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Literacy: The First Decade of the New Millennium  
Jack Cassidy, Ph.D., Millersville University, and Evan Ortlieb, Ph.D., Texas A&M University

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Shelley B. Wepner, Ed.D., Manhattanville College, and Diana J. Quatroche, Ph.D., Indiana State University

Portrayals of Bullying in Children’s Picture Books and Implications for Bibliotherapy  
Emily Moulton, Ed.S., Falcon School District, and Melissa Allen Heath, Ph.D., Mary Anne Prater, Ph.D., and Tina Taylor Dyches, Ed.D., Brigham Young University

The Three-Phase Reading Comprehension Intervention (3-RCI): A Support for Intermediate-Grade Word Callers  

Books for Laughing Out Loud  
Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D., Washington State University, and Terrell A. Young, Ed.D., Brigham Young University
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From the Editor

Teaching is a dynamic, interesting experience filled with challenges and constant change. The field of literacy research and practice is much the same; there always seems to be something new on the horizon. Some new book, new reader, new thinking that spurs us to wonder and want to know more. Throughout history people have introduced the new and different to our field in some profound ways. John Dewey changed teaching by speaking of the “organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25) and instructing us on those experiences that are educative and those that are not. Louise Rosenblatt changed the way we thought about reading when she warned us to never forget what the reader brings to any text, warning us that “the human element cannot be banished” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1983, p. 6). Paulo Freire admonished us to change our thinking about educating the oppressed when he said, “only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (Freire, 1968, p. 28). Sonia Nieto (1993) called for teachers to think differently about multicultural education when she challenged educators to be aware of and comfortable with their own ethnicity thus better understanding their students.

In the field of young adult literature, S. E. Hinton introduced us to Pony Boy and Johnny in 1965 and the phrase “stay golden” became part of the American vernacular. A mere 13 years ago, a young boy received an invitation that changed his (and our) life forever. Harry didn’t know what was waiting for him at Hogwarts nor did we, but many followed his journey with breathless anticipation. Those seven books changed the idea of young adult literature forever as people of all ages waited anxiously for each new book. Three years ago we were introduced to Katniss Everdeen who stepped forward to take her sister’s place in the Hunger Games. Once again, as with Harry Potter, readers found themselves enthralled by a world fraught with peril and unspeakable horrors.

Yes, our field is ever-changing. And isn’t it great to be a part of it?

This current issue of Reading Horizons brings us some new thoughts about ideas old and not-so-old. Jack Cassidy, the researcher behind the International Reading Association’s (IRA) “What’s Hot and What’s Not” lists for the last 14 years, and his colleague Evan Ortlieb analyzed the last ten years of lists and discuss how the field has changed. Topics such as phonics and fluency are receiving considerably less attention as common core standards and adolescent literacy are on the rise. This discussion
is fascinating as we see how the thinking of literacy researchers and practitioners has changed in the first decade of the millennium.

The position of the literacy specialist has changed as well as they are called upon to take more responsible positions of leaderships in our schools. Understanding this change, Shelley Wepner and Diana Quatroche researched how colleges and universities are preparing candidates to be that kind of leader. Having interviewed faculty in literacy graduate programs around the country, the authors found that successful programs require a course in leadership that has the candidates actively working with teachers in the field. In addition, the programs help develop the communication and collaboration skills of the future literacy coaches.

Some things, unfortunately, have not changed. Bullying is still an issue for far too many people as, even with the recent spate of hate crimes against the LGBT community and Muslims and national press condemning such behavior, bullying behavior is still all too present. In an attempt to make a change in early elementary classrooms, Emily Moulton and her colleagues analyzed how bullying is portrayed in children’s picture books. The purpose of the analysis was to find those books that best portray how to effectively handle bullying situations. The authors admonish educators to use books in a form of bibliotherapy as they lead young readers through some well-written texts that model positive change in the bully thereby creating a safer environment.

One area that is constantly changing is our understanding of reading comprehension. The fact that reading is an invisible, mental activity can make instruction in comprehension even more difficult. Holly Diehl and her colleagues researched the effects of the Three-Phase Reading Comprehension Intervention (3-RCI) with students who had adequate decoding skills but struggled with reading comprehension. The researchers also analyzed the teachers’ behavior finding that the interactive teaching style was more successful with enhancing young readers’ comprehension than was the recitative style.

One thing that never changes is our need to find humor in life and laugh. Barbara Ward and Terry Young, our ever-changing literature experts, remind us of this as they share books that will make readers of all ages laugh out loud. There’s something about a bulldog dressed up as a princess that makes the heart glad and many will delight in doing the Croaky Pokey with young readers. For a genuine belly laugh, read poetry about dogs and their need to drool, run, slobber, and fart in cars. And, just in
case you need to do some analysis of the funny, Ward and Young include a non-fiction book that includes interviews with experts on the subject.

Change is good and inevitable and it’s coming to Reading Horizons, too. Starting with Volume 52, the journal will be completely online as we become a part of the Digital Commons community. All submissions will be handled through a central website which will hopefully make the process quicker and more simple. More information will be sent to subscribers in the near future so the transition is as seamless as possible.

Change is on the horizon. It’s waiting for us in the very next minute and it will come whether we like it or not. Who knows what questions are being asked at this very moment and how our field will change as a result. One thing is certain, somewhere there is a person asking and finding. Somewhere there is an author creating a person, a world, a story that will transfix us and make us something new.


Allison L. Baer, Ph.D.
Editor, Reading Horizons
Kalamazoo, MI

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*The Ohio State University, Marion, Ohio*

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*University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio*

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Literacy: The First Decade of the New Millennium

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Abstract

Although the importance of literacy instruction has remained constant since the beginning of the new millennium, literacy trends have shifted, often alongside acts of legislation. Areas of literacy education that were once overlooked in the past like adolescent literacy and RTI are now receiving increased attention, whereas areas of literacy like phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency receive considerably less attention than 10 years ago. Discussions describe “very hot” and “cold” topics as they relate to philosophy/approach, level, content, materials, and assessment. Educators can utilize the findings in this survey to adjust their instruction and direct attention to needed areas within their own schools.

Beginnings of new decades invariably provide an opportunity to look back at the preceding 10 years and draw comparisons as well as note changes that have occurred. The December 6, 2010 issue of Time magazine provided such a reflection in a themed issue titled “Time Frames Issue: What Really Happened 2000-2010.” Therefore, we thought it might be worthwhile to look back at the “hot” and “not so hot” issues in literacy: topics which appeared on the annual “What’s Hot” list when we surveyed literacy leaders in 2000, and those “hot” and “not so hot” issues in literacy when we surveyed literacy leaders in 2010 (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2000/2001; Cassidy, Ortleib, & Shettel, 2010/2011). Rather than review the whole decade, we looked specifically at two years: 2000, when we interviewed literacy leaders for the 2001 list and 2010, when we interviewed our panel for the 2011 list.
Some History

In the mid-1990s, we noticed that the field of literacy education lacked sufficient data regarding its progression. Hence, we thought it would be useful to create a list which educators could use as a resource to contextualize their work. This body of work would allow us, as literacy professionals, to learn from the past and in turn, refine our practices to suit the ever-changing needs of the educational community.

In 1996 we began surveying newspapers that published “What’s Hot and What’s Not” types of lists, as well as those who avidly read these publications, to explicitly define what is meant by “what’s hot” and “what’s not.” The consensus from these sources was that “what’s hot” indicated that a topic was receiving increased or more positive attention; while “what’s not” meant that the subject was receiving decreased or negative attention. These lists of topics did not represent the relative importance of a topic or its impact on the field of literacy.

Each year we interviewed, either by phone or in person, a panel of literacy leaders from different geographic areas in the United States as well as a leader from Canada and one from outside of North America. Participants included leaders of professional associations and those who have had long-term influences on the field of literacy. We wanted to consider all levels of education including central office personnel, administrators, classroom teachers, and college professors. All, however, had to have a national or international perspective on literacy education. For the first list, “What’s Hot, What’s Not for 1997” (Cassidy & Wenrich, 1997), we assembled 22 leaders, and 25 in each subsequent year.

Survey respondents were given specific directions to exclude personal opinions from rating a given topic as hot or not hot; instead, they would rate the topic according to their perspective of whether the topic was currently receiving increased or more positive attention, or the topic was receiving decreased or negative attention. Beginning in 2000, these literacy leaders had an additional opportunity to express their own opinions in the second part of the survey as respondents were asked, “Should this topic be hot?”

In its first year (1997), we constructed the survey from topics identified from professional literacy journals, more general and widely circulated education journals (e.g., Phi Delta Kappan, Educational Leadership, Education Week), popular magazines, newspapers, and recent convention programs. In subsequent years, we relied on the year’s previous respondents to make needed modifications, deletions, and additions. Based on its early success, the “What’s Hot, What’s Not” list became an annual feature in the International Reading Association’s (IRA) membership newspaper, Reading Today (see Cassidy & Cassidy, 1998/1999, 1999/2000; Cassidy
& Wenrich, 1997, 1998). For the last 15 years the “What’s Hot, What’s Not” lists have received far greater attention than expected, as they have been translated into Spanish, modified for use in other countries, summarized in newspapers, and utilized in collegiate courses and professional development experiences for classroom teachers. The lists have also prompted readers to express their opposition to: (a) the items on the lists, (b) the selection of survey respondents, and even (c) the survey results (e.g., Dewitz, 1999). Longer discussions of the topics on the list have appeared in a number of other venues (Cassidy & Wenrich, 1998/1999; Cassidy & Cassidy, 2004; Cassidy, Garrett, & Barrera, 2006; Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010; Cassidy, Valadez, Garrett, & Barrera, 2010).

Although it has been only 10 years since the new millennium, significant changes in the field of literacy prompted a new focus on topics and issues that were overwhelmingly perceived to be hot or not hot in the survey published in December 2010/January 2011. Items deemed hot or not received more than 75 percent agreement from the 25 interviewees. This near-consensus list provides a glimpse at literacy education 10 years into the new millennium. Now in its 15th year, “What’s Hot for 2011” includes an updated list with current data from the survey completed in mid-2010. Table 1 (Cassidy et al., 2010/2011) summarizes the results of the survey.

Table 1. What’s Hot and What’s Not? (2011) Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>What’s Hot</th>
<th>What’s Not</th>
<th>Should Be Hot</th>
<th>Should Not Be Hot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent literacy</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core learning/literacy standards*</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reading and writing</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-based assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary/content area literacy*</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a second language/Eng. language learners (-)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency (-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-stakes assessment (-)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational/nonfiction texts</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality/reading multiple texts</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy coaches/reading coaches (-)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/engagement</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New literacies/digital literacies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic awareness (-)</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics (-)</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/policy influences on literacy</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool literacy instruction/experiences</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development (inservice)</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to intervention</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific evidence-based reading research &amp; instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling/striving readers (grade 4 &amp; above)</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher education for reading (preservice) (-)</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary/word meaning</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>√√√√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**
- √ Indicates that more than 50 percent of the respondents were in agreement (hot or not hot)
- √√ Indicates that at least 75 percent of the respondents were in agreement (very hot or cold)
- √√√ Indicates that all the respondents were in agreement (extremely hot or extremely cold)
- (+) indicates the topic was hotter for 2010 than 2009
- (-) indicates the topic was less hot for 2010 than 2009
- (*) indicates new topic for 2010

Participants in this year’s survey were Richard Allington, University of Tennessee; Donna Alvermann, University of Georgia; Kathryn H. Au, School Rise Inc, HI; Thomas Bean, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Heather Bell, Rosebank School, New Zealand; David Bloomer, Ohio State University; Karen Bromley, Binghamton University, SUNY, NY; William G. Brozo, George Mason University, VA; Robert Cooter, Bellarmine University, KY; Patricia A. Edwards, Michigan State University; Joyce Hinman, Bismark Schools, ND; James V. Hoffman, University of Texas; Lori Jamison, Toronto, Canada; Barbara Kapinus, National Education Association, Washington, DCMD; Donald J. Leu, University of Connecticut; Marsha Lewis, Duplin Schools, North Carolina; P. David Pearson, University of California at Berkeley; Taffy Raphael, University of Illinois – Chicago; Timothy Rasinski, Kent State University, Ohio; D. Ray Reutzel, Utah State University; Victoria J. Risko, Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, TN; Misty Sailors, University of Texas-San Antonio; Timothy Shanahan, University of Illinois, Chicago; Dorothy Strickland, Rutgers University, New Jersey; and Linda Young, Hans Herr Elementary School, PA.

To facilitate longer discussions, in 2000 (Cassidy, Brozo, & Cassidy, 2000; Cassidy, 2002), we divided the various topics into five categories: (a) philosophy/approach, (b) level, (c) content, (d) materials, and (e) assessment; and looked at the “very hot” or “cold” topics within each category. In this piece, we have revisited
those categories and compared the 2000/2001 survey results with the 2010/2011 results (see Table 2). The changes have been dramatic!

**Table 2. Comparison of What’s Hot and What’s Not**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy/Approach</td>
<td>Balanced Reading Instruction</td>
<td>Whole Language</td>
<td>Core Learning Literacy Standards</td>
<td>Intertextuality/Reading Multiple Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-based Practice</td>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Early Intervention</td>
<td>Adolescent Literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Phonemic Awareness Phonics</td>
<td>Comprehension Vocabulary Spelling</td>
<td>Comprehension Fluency Phonemic Awareness Phonics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Decodable Text</td>
<td>Literature/Based Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>High Stakes Assessment</td>
<td>Portfolio Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2000/2001 balanced reading instruction, guided reading, and research-based practice were the hot issues. On the 2010/2011 list balanced reading instruction and guided reading had been dropped from the survey. The literacy leaders probably suggested the elimination of balanced reading because of increasing confusion as to what the term meant (Cassidy & Wenrich, 1998). Guided reading was probably targeted for deletion because so much had been written on the topic and also because literacy leaders thought it was very similar to older approaches such as the directed reading thinking activity (DRTA). The topic research-based practice has been modified and is now identified as scientific research-based reading research & instruction. It is still a hot topic but it has lost heat since the end of the Bush administrations (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010).

Since its enactment within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA]; U.S. Department of Education, 2004), Response to Intervention (RTI) has received increasing attention each year it has been featured in the “What’s Hot, What’s Not” list. The foremost goal of RTI is prevention of learning difficulties by providing effective language and literacy instruction. Its importance to the field of literacy was underscored when the International Reading Association appointed 30 members to form an RTI Commission to serve the evolving concepts that impact
students, teachers, and administrators alike. Probably the most prevalent model for RTI is the three-tiered approach with tier one being effective in-class instruction for struggling readers, tier two being small group short term intervention, and tier three being long term supplemental instruction. Perhaps the implementation of RTI in U.S. schools has in part contributed to the decline of students labeled as learning disabled.

Core learning/literacy standards debuted on the “What’s Hot” list in 2011 and was immediately rated “very hot.” Core learning in the U.S. is an effort to standardize what K-12 pupils should be achieving each year in English Language Arts as well as Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Grade level standards for literacy include varied topics such as comprehension, creating texts, drama, fluency, listening, phonemic awareness, phonics, speaking, vocabulary, and writing. As part of a state-led initiative to prepare America’s students for college and their future careers, the National Governors Association for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released a set of English-Language Arts standards, termed the Common Core State Standards, in June 2010. As of August, 2011, 44 states, four territories, and the District of Columbia of the United States have agreed to the adoption and implementation process. The purpose of common standards is to ensure that all students are proficient language users so they can succeed in school, contribute to society, and pursue their own goals. These standards provide clear and consistent expectations as well as rigorous content and application opportunities. The finalized standards were also informed by top performing countries so students can succeed in the global economy. To read more about the Core Learning Standards and to find out which states have adopted them, refer to http://www.corestandards.org.

Level

Adolescent literacy has been a mainstay as a hot topic for the second half of the decade so it is not surprising that it is one of the hottest topics for 2011. National attention has been directed towards adolescent literacy in part due to the currently elevated high school dropout rate, alongside reports like Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007), Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals About College Readiness in Reading (ACT, 2006), Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004), Reading to Achieve: A Governor’s Guide to Adolescent Literacy (National Governors Association, 2005), Writing
Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools (Graham & Perin, 2007), and a more recent report, Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success (Council for Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2009). These reports indicate that a focus on middle and high school literacy development is necessary for educational reform to commence. The recent awareness of adolescent literacy also explains why struggling/striving readers is also a “hot topic.” When we surveyed our respondents in 2000 for the 2001 article, adolescent literacy was not even on the list.

Early intervention or early literacy was one of the hottest topics in 2000/2001 and it is encouraging that it is still a “hot” topic. Perhaps it has lost some heat because some attention has been focused on the older reader: grade 4 and above. This reflects the fact that not all literacy problems children experience can be solved in the earliest years.

Content

Perhaps the most dramatic shift in attention in the field from 2000/2001 to 2010/2011 has been in the content of literacy education. Phonemic awareness and phonics, both very hot topics in 2000/2001 were definitely “cold” in 2010/2011 and most literacy leaders concurred with this loss of heat. Most of those interviewed felt that too much attention and research had been focused on these topics (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010). Comprehension, a cold topic in 2000/2001, was very hot in 2010/2011 (Block, Parris, & Morrow, 2008; Gambrell, Morrow, Pressley, & Guthrie, 2007) and most authorities would agree that the single most important aspect to literacy is meaning construction. However in years past, comprehension was primarily associated with upper elementary grades and as a result, not given as much attention as topics related to early reading instruction like phonemic awareness and phonics, which are both currently not hot topics. Fluency, which debuted on the “What’s Hot” list in 2003 and was immediately “very hot,” had slipped to the “cold” category by 2011 and most educators agreed that too much attention had been focused on that area. The shift in content focus in the field could have dramatic effects in the classroom. Perhaps struggling sixth graders will no longer be subjected to phonemic awareness exercises and maybe more attention will be paid to comprehension for kindergarteners and first graders.

Materials

Another important shift in the field from 2000/2001 to 2010/2011 is the fact that no materials are in the “very hot” category on the survey. In 2000/2001,
decodable text was a hot topic. That material emphasis was consistent with the content focus on phonics and phonemic awareness. Perhaps we are realizing that no specific kinds of materials can guarantee success for all students. Not surprisingly, decodable text, which was a “very hot” topic in 2001, had disappeared from the list in 2011. The emphasis on phonics in the beginning of the decade forced attention on materials using a great preponderance of words that were decodable using the phonic elements that had been taught.

Although no specific types of materials are “very hot” for 2010/2011, informational/non-fiction texts have garnered attention from literacy leaders for several years. Classrooms have departed from the traditional usage of fictional texts in early grades (PK-2) and non-fiction texts in grades 3 and above to utilizing all genres of books from the onset of schooling (Buss & Karnowski, 2002; Vasquez, 2010). Curriculums that embed informational/non-fiction texts allow students to develop content area knowledge while improving their reading abilities. This integration of the content areas is especially necessary for teachers pressed for time during their instructional periods.

Assessment

Another significant change from 2000/2001 to 2010/2011 is that no assessment topic appears to be “very hot,” although that situation will probably change soon. High-stakes assessment is still “hot” and has become a cornerstone in almost every school nationwide with increasing emphasis over the last 20 years. Students of every grade level are expected to meet or exceed grade-level-appropriate benchmarks. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan of the Obama administration, has championed for national standards to measure knowledge, skills, and performance in hopes of increasing student learning. Finding the balance between data collection/analysis and the utilization of those findings within instruction is a difficult but necessary task for all educators. As soon as policy makers determine how to establish that balance, an assessment topic will probably be “very hot” again.

Some Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Literacy trends have clearly fluctuated over time. Since the new millennium, however, significant change has resulted in the field redirecting attention to address many topics that were perhaps overlooked in the past. It is clear that not only do three of the five pillars of reading education (fluency, phonemic awareness, and phonics) receive less attention now than in 2000 when the report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) propelled them to the forefront, but that most literacy leaders
feel that these topics have received too much attention and should not be hot (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010). Indeed, there are other aspects of literacy that are currently receiving a greater amount of attention like adolescent literacy and RTI. Those in the field of literacy have long known the value of comprehension and believe it should be the primary focus of every literacy program. Educators can utilize the findings in this survey to adjust their instruction and direct attention to needed areas within their own schools.

(Note: The pronoun “we” is used throughout this piece. In this case, it refers to the numerous literacy educators who have worked with Jack Cassidy in analyzing and interpreting the data from the “What’s Hot” surveys over the last 15 years.)

References


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How Are Colleges and Universities Preparing Reading Specialist Candidates for Leadership Positions in the Schools?

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Abstract

This article reports on the results of 11 interviews conducted as a follow-up to a survey that examined the perceptions of university faculty regarding the importance of graduate programs preparing reading specialists for leadership roles. The results of the interviews indicate that programs require a leadership course that has reading specialist candidates actually working with classroom teachers in a school setting. These programs also require that reading specialist candidates provide professional development and develop skills in communication and collaboration. We suggest that the surveyed programs provide a model of what could be offered in master’s degree/certification programs for reading specialists.

The Literacy Specialist

There is now widespread recognition that reading specialists are expected to serve as leaders of literacy for teachers, schools, and communities because they have been given responsibility for the literacy performance of readers in general and struggling readers in particular (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; International Reading Association, 2010). The ever-evolving role of the literacy coach has also contributed to an appreciation of the knowledge and skills that reading specialists should bring to their position (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; Blachowicz et al., 2010;
Hall, 2004; Israel, 2005; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). In many instances, literacy coaches have been hired to provide professional development and support to classroom teachers to improve classroom instruction; serve as a resource to paraprofessionals, administrators, and the community; and provide professional development for the entire school community. In other words, literacy coaches are expected to serve as leaders of a school’s reading program.

Depending on state guidelines for licensure, these literacy coaches are coming from the classroom or are brought from the traditional reading specialist role (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Shaw, Smith, Chesler, & Romeo, 2005). When literacy coaches come from the classroom, they are not necessarily trained as reading specialists, and do not necessarily have any graduate preparation in reading (IRA Surveys Coaches, 2006; Toll, 2005). This in part is due to the growing need for literacy coaches to help with the Reading First program of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Reading First aims to enable all children to become successful early readers, with the focus on kindergarten through third grade and a major part of the program involves providing professional development for teachers in using scientifically based reading programs. The goal is then to be able to hold schools and states accountable for students’ progress on a variety of assessment tools. In addition, these literacy coaches were used to help with teachers’ professional development (Shanklin, 2007). Many assert that ideally, those with graduate degrees in reading should serve as leaders of literacy programs (L’Allier et al., 2010). Consequently, graduate programs in reading should include courses to prepare reading specialists as leaders with coaching responsibilities.

We determined that we needed to find out more about ways graduate programs for reading specialists are preparing their candidates to become leaders as IRA/NCATE standards are now more heavily focused on the leadership/coaching role. However, how these standards are interpreted is at issue because, while some reading specialist programs embed leadership experiences throughout a program, others devote one specific course to leadership practices. To feel equipped to serve in a leadership role, reading specialists need practice in providing leadership, which may or may not be part of a reading specialist program. It is also important to consider whether reading specialist candidates have practiced as leaders in an actual school setting, a university reading clinic setting, or only with peers within a university graduate course.
Historical Practices and Current Standards for Reading Professionals

The role of reading specialists as leaders is not new. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the role developed to address post-Sputnik concerns about literacy in the United States, reading specialists served as resource persons, advisors, and in-service leaders (Robinson & Rauch, 1965; Vogt & Shearer, 2003). A shift in reading specialists’ positions occurred in the early 1980s with the advent of changes in Title I when they evolved into functioning primarily as remedial reading teachers. A downward trend in the use of reading specialists as leaders continued until the late 1990s and early 2000s. Studies that were conducted during this period found that reading specialists needed to have responsibility for school-wide literacy improvement for all students (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002; Long, 1995; Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001).

Current standards for reading specialists call for the leadership role because, as Pipes (2004) reports, work with classroom teachers ensures that there is quality “first” teaching. The role of the literacy coach also appears in the current standards for reading professionals (International Reading Association, 2004a) where one of the categories is designated as reading specialist/reading coach. The description of the category lists the following responsibilities for this role: (a) Be a resource to teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and the community; (b) collaborate and work cooperatively with other professionals; (c) provide professional development; and (d) advocate for students.

Each standard within this category includes descriptions that use words such as assist, support, help, communicate, collaborate, and demonstrate. For example, a reading specialist might “collaborate” with the classroom teacher on assessment data and “help” the teacher develop instructional strategies to address student needs. These standards are a reflection of the increasingly important leadership role that reading specialists are assuming (Bean, Knaub, & Swan, 2000), especially as it relates to the improvement of the quality of classroom teaching (Allington & Baker, 1999). These standards are also the result of the 1998 report of the National Research Council which recommended that schools should have access to reading specialists who can address reading difficulties and give guidance to classroom teachers (Bean, 2004; Lapp, Fisher, Flood, & Frey, 2003; Shaw et al., 2005; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

The standards actually parallel what reading specialists believe their responsibilities are. In a first national survey conducted by Bean, Trovato, and Hamilton
(1995), reading specialists indicated that they performed many different tasks in an instructional role and in a leadership role. In a follow-up national survey (Bean et al., 2002), reading specialists identified similar roles, with most respondents indicating that they actually served as a resource to teachers, often on a daily basis. More than half of the reading specialists from this second survey reported increased pressure to serve as a resource to teachers. Interviews with reading specialists in a later study indicated that reading specialists use their instructional role to provide a pathway to this leadership by gaining access to teachers to discuss both students and the school reading program (Bean et al., 2003).

Acknowledging the importance of the leadership role for reading specialists, research has been conducted on ways to serve as an effective leader. For example, ways in which collaboration can impact teacher practice has been studied (Dole, 2004; Picard, 2005; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Jaeger (1996), who refers to reading specialists as collaborative consultants, identifies specific collaborative responsibilities that involve serving as a resource to teachers and parents, teaching classroom demonstrations, and providing ideas about instructional strategies and ongoing staff development.

Several characteristics have been identified that appear to lead to successful collaboration. These include shared vision, commitment, caring, positive interaction, and power sharing (Brownell, Yeager, Rennells, & Riley, 1997; David & Handler, 2001). Also identified are some of the benefits of successful collaboration such as positive teacher self-perceptions, a heightened sense of efficacy, an improved knowledge base, teacher leadership, and improved learning for students. There is also some evidence that supports the development of collaboration through guided practice (Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Reif & Coulon, 1994).

Guth and Pettengill (2005) provide specific suggestions on ways to promote collaboration as an integral part of the reading program: (a) clear guidelines; (b) discussion of such guidelines; (c) meetings with teams or grade levels to discuss assessment results and use such results to create flexible groups; (d) the development of a reading model that works best for each team; and (e) the reading specialist’s maintenance of a flexible schedule to be available for such collaboration.

As the leadership role continues to emerge as a critical component for reading specialists and literacy coaches, more research will become available on exemplary models and conditions for cultivating such a role. In the meantime, and because reading specialists do not necessarily feel prepared to handle these leadership responsibilities (Bean, 2004; Bean et al., 2003; Bean et al., 1995), more needs
to be done to prepare reading specialists and literacy coaches to know how to work with children and at the same time emerge as leaders who work collaboratively with colleagues (Bean et al., 2003).

**Perceptions and Beliefs of Literacy Educators**

While it seems obvious that teacher education programs should play a pivotal role in preparing reading specialists to serve as leaders or literacy coaches, Shaw et al. (2005) reported that the necessary preparation work of courses and field experiences would require a paradigm shift for graduate reading and literacy programs.

Because we were unaware of any research that identifies what schools, colleges, and Departments of Education are doing with the leadership component of their reading specialist programs, we developed and administered a survey to identify faculty perceptions of the importance of developing reading specialists’ leadership skills. We thought that this information would help us determine if institutions are providing adequate preparation for our graduates to succeed as leaders of literacy in their respective schools. We also thought that the results of such a survey would be important for professional associations such as the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) to have as they work with national accrediting bodies (e.g., National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE]) and state departments of education to develop curriculum standards related to the inclusion of leadership components for literacy programs.

**Description and Findings from the Survey**

Two major questions were addressed in the survey:

1. What aspects of leadership are currently in place in your program to develop reading specialists?

2. What content and experiences should be included in programs to develop reading specialists?

The survey had a 45 percent response rate, with 233 of the 518 surveys returned. Slightly more than half of the respondents, who are professors of reading, indicated that a course in leadership is required in their programs. Yet nearly 70 percent of the respondents believe that such a course should be offered. Sixty-two percent of the respondents indicated that reading specialists need to demonstrate leadership competencies in these three leadership areas before they are eligible for
certification: (a) resource to classroom teachers, administrators, and parents; (b) staff development; and (c) literacy program development and coordination.

All respondents indicated that reading specialists should serve as leaders with the curriculum, help build home-school connections, and communicate information about the reading program to various stakeholders. This finding about the importance of the leadership role is consistent with the IRA’s position on the role of the reading specialist (International Reading Association, 2004b). Respondents also indicated that the three areas of the reading specialist’s leadership role are equally important, and they believe that reading specialists should be prepared to focus on helping teachers become more knowledgeable about the teaching of reading by assisting them with ideas, strategies, and materials; modeling strategies and techniques; and providing professional development workshops (Quatroche & Wepner, 2008).

**Purpose and Procedures of the Current Study**

As a follow-up to the survey, we returned to 16 respondents who said that they teach a course related to literacy leadership within their master’s degree in reading program to gather additional information about the content of the course. We found that 11 of the 16 respondents were willing and able to respond to the questions by telephone. We posed 10 questions to find out about the specific course(s), the position of the course(s) in the program, the qualifications of those teaching the course(s), requirements for the course(s), the status of their program with meeting IRA/NCATE 2003 standards for reading specialists, perceived benefits for students, and recommendations. We reviewed the information gathered from all 11 interviews and used this information to develop seven categories. We then went back to the interviews to include specific information within each category.

**Findings from the Telephone Interviews**

Table 1 presents the results of the telephone interviews. With the exception of two of the programs, all leadership courses occur at the end of the program. One program has a leadership course in the beginning and the middle, and one program has such a course integrated throughout the program. Course titles vary greatly and the majority of courses have key words such as administration, supervision, and leader; four have the word practicum in the title.
Table 1. Responses About Leadership Experiences in Master’s Degree in Reading Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Univ.</th>
<th>Location of Course(s) in Program</th>
<th>Name of Course(s)</th>
<th>Student Requirements</th>
<th>Experience of Instructor</th>
<th>Meets IRA Standards?</th>
<th>Location of Experience</th>
<th>Perceived Benefits</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>End Experience in Literacy Supervision</td>
<td>Observe graduate students teaching children at university reading clinic and give feedback to graduate students. Coach graduate students on conducting parent-teacher conference.</td>
<td>Former K-12 Reading Specialist and School Administrator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Campus Clinic or Local Schools</td>
<td>Gives candidates opportunity to interact with teachers and parents, and work collaboratively with other professionals to help them with teaching methods.</td>
<td>Two semesters of practicum instead of one semester</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>End Developing Leaders in Literacy Practicum II: Leadership in Literacy</td>
<td>Do observations. Complete portfolio to document leadership experiences, based on IRA standards. Make a presentation to teachers.</td>
<td>Currently Reading Specialist and Coach</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Helps assess students in a practical setting</td>
<td>Work with educational leadership faculty, current reading coaches, and administrators to determine relevant leadership needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>End Supervision and Administration of Literacy Program</td>
<td>Prepare a portfolio that documents experiences related to the IRA standards.</td>
<td>Former Literacy Coordinator and School Principal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Helps students achieve competence and confidence and implement reading and writing strategies in their schools. Convey requirements and expectations to students early and often so that they can prepare their school administrators for this requirement; help school administrators understand the benefits of leadership preparation for reading personnel.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>End Practicum in Supervision</td>
<td>Non-specific tasks related to observations.</td>
<td>Former Principal and Superintendent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Hands on, practical day-to-day problem-solving. Increase the number of practicum hours; faculty who teach the course should have their own practical experiences leading reading programs.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Univ.</td>
<td>Location of Course(s) in Program</td>
<td>Name of Course(s)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Teaching Reading in Classroom of Diversity Diagnosis and Practicum Role of the Reading Teacher Second Practicum (Each course has a coaching component)</td>
<td>Plan units for teachers to teach Put together a booklet and present RTI information that teachers can use Select hot topic from IRA standards that relates to their district to develop a staff development program Conduct needs assessment to determine a specific school’s needs for the selected hot topic Develop and deliver staff development program to teachers in a school on the hot topic, based on the results of the needs assessment Complete a coaching experience</td>
<td>Former Reading Teacher and English/Language Arts Department Coordinator Adjuncts are Certified Literacy Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Makes students stronger in understanding the importance of literacy and the potential that reading teachers can provide</td>
<td>Enhance the case study report; make a lot of contacts with schools in the areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Administration and Supervision of Reading Programs</td>
<td>Interview three school leaders and develop a report Create a professional development program and a poster session on a piece of the professional development program</td>
<td>Former Reading Specialist</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Students have a better picture of the actual role of the reading specialist</td>
<td>If the course is online, make sure that there is sufficient face-to-face contact with the students to support their learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Practicum in Reading (only for Literacy Coaches)</td>
<td>Refine and strengthen school-based plans and activities Survey paraprofessionals, teachers, counselors, and administrators Write and submit a literacy grant based on school needs Write a reading/language arts program based on school needs Observe, confer, and coach teachers</td>
<td>Former Reading Specialist</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Helps them to understand the roles and responsibilities of actually being a literacy specialist; gives them the opportunity to collaborate with classroom teachers and receive feedback about their interactions</td>
<td>Make it as hands on as possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### How are Colleges and Universities Preparing Reading Specialist Candidates?

Student requirements are as varied as the course titles as they are required to work directly with K-12 personnel, develop instructional plans, and develop different types of documentation, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Univ.</th>
<th>Location of Course(s) in Program</th>
<th>Name of Course(s)</th>
<th>Student Requirements</th>
<th>Experience of Instructor</th>
<th>Meets IRA Standards?</th>
<th>Location of Experience</th>
<th>Perceived Benefits</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Organization and Supervision of Reading Program Development</td>
<td>Set up a literacy program, based on need of a public or private school setting. Conduct training, follow-up, and evaluations</td>
<td>Former Reading Specialist</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Builds students' confidence, knowledge, and expertise by working in a real setting</td>
<td>Keep it hands on in a practical setting and incorporate current research</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Beginning and Middle</td>
<td>Leadership for School Improvement</td>
<td>Log leadership experiences, and reflect on them; two hours per week</td>
<td>Former Principal, Assistant Principal, and Teacher Program Coordinator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Students begin to realize their potential as teacher leaders and literacy specialists; students apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world situations, which enables them to reflect on their leadership practices</td>
<td>Require field experiences as part of a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Integrated throughout program</td>
<td>Organizing and Supervising the Literacy Program</td>
<td>Create a teacher-friendly handbook of best practices to be used a resource for teachers Conduct a professional workshop for grade-level colleagues Coach teachers. Document and reflect on coaching experiences</td>
<td>Former Reading Specialist and Literacy Coach</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local Schools</td>
<td>Students realize that they can make a school-wide impact on literacy instruction; students understand the importance of effective communication skills</td>
<td>Permit students to experience the role of coaches as educational leaders to build professional learning communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Administration and Supervision of Literacy Programs Internship in Reading Supervision Analysis, Interpretation and Dissemination of Literacy Assessment</td>
<td>Complete program evaluation, school literacy profession, and conduct a staff development program</td>
<td>Former Teacher and Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local schools</td>
<td>Helps students gain confidence and build leadership skills in developing plans and making programmatic changes</td>
<td>Recruit more principal involvement; develop positive relationships with teachers and administrators; collaborate with the schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Observe classroom teaching of reading.
2. Observe other graduate students and give feedback.
3. Coach teachers.
4. Make presentations to classroom teachers.
5. Serve as a coach on conducting a parent teacher conference.
6. Interview school leaders.
7. Plan teaching units for other teachers.
8. Write a reading/language arts program.
9. Strengthen school-based plans.
10. Develop a staff development program.
11. Conduct a needs assessment.
12. Participate in a poster session.
13. Conduct a survey.
14. Write and submit a grant.
16. Conduct a program evaluation.
17. Complete portfolio to document experiences.

All faculty responsible for teaching the courses have had leadership experiences in the schools as literacy specialists or school administrators. Seven are former reading specialists and four are former principals. With the exception of one program, all faculty who teach these courses are employed full-time and all of the programs meet the IRA standards required for NCATE. All faculty use local schools; only one indicated that some of the experiences are at the campus clinic.

Faculty who taught the leadership courses and practicum stated that these experiences for reading specialist candidates give candidates the opportunity to (a) interact with teachers and parents; (b) work collaboratively with other professionals; (c) build leadership skills in developing plans and making programmatic changes; (d) increase confidence, knowledge, and expertise by working in a real setting; (e) have a hands-on experience in implementing reading and writing strategies in the schools; (f) understand the importance and impact of the reading specialist and the actual roles and responsibilities; (g) reflect on feedback from others about their
leadership skills and interactions; and (h) understand the importance of effective communication skills. Faculty commented that these leadership experiences helped them to assess candidates in a practical setting.

Faculty made the following recommendations to improve their own programs or other reading specialist programs:

1. Increase the amount of practicum time by adding another semester or increasing the number of hours within a semester.
2. Work with educational leadership faculty, current reading coaches, and administrators to determine leadership needs of literacy specialists.
3. Work with local schools so that administrators are willing to host and mentor reading specialist candidates.
4. Ensure that faculty responsible for practicum have their own experiences leading a reading program.
5. Ensure that candidates have sufficient hands-on experiences.

Discussion and Implications

The 11 faculty who responded to our interview questions indicated that they believe their leadership courses provide experiences to prepare their candidates for the leadership component of the role of reading specialist. Programs include the observation of teaching with follow-up feedback or coaching, and require that candidates have the experience of providing professional development to teachers. This could be based on a needs assessment or a “hot topic” in literacy. Most programs also require students to document their experiences in some form, e.g., a portfolio, case study report, or poster presentation. Several other experiences include developing a best-practices handbook for teachers or writing and submitting a grant.

Overall, reading specialist candidates are required to work with teachers in a real setting to learn how to collaborate with other professionals to develop a school’s literacy program. Those who teach these courses are also qualified to do so. The faculty believe that the real-world experiences help their candidates to develop their leadership skills as reading specialists because they are receiving feedback on their ability to work with teachers. Faculty also recognize that candidates need even more time in the schools working with teachers and administrators and think that
more work needs to be done in helping local schools to understand the importance of this experience for reading specialist candidates.

The interviews indicate that there are programs that are making a concerted effort to prepare reading specialists as leaders. Reading specialist candidates are working with teachers to assist them in providing instruction and they are providing professional development to teachers to help improve practice. As reading specialist candidates work with teachers, they are required to reflect on their own practices so that they can learn how to best serve as coaches. All 11 programs meet IRA standards, which means that they are providing opportunities for reading specialist candidates to plan instruction, assist teachers, and provide literate environments. In addition, their candidates provide professional development to classroom teachers and reflect on their effectiveness as collaborators and communicators.

Although we interviewed only approximately 10 percent of the respondents from the original survey, we believe that the number of programs requiring a leadership component is beginning to increase. One of us who serves as an IRA/NCATE reviewer for reading specialist programs is finding that many programs are beginning to meet this standard because the leadership component is being integrated into coursework. Consequently, we believe that changes in the curriculum for reading specialists are beginning to catch up with the most recent standards.

It is encouraging to discover that master’s degrees/certification programs do include a leadership course or a leadership component that meets IRA standards. This leadership course or component helps reading specialists more effectively aid teachers to use classroom assessments reliably to determine students’ needs and plan instruction accordingly (International Reading Association, 2004b). It also appears that reading specialist candidates are learning how to provide professional development for teachers, mentor and coach teachers, and develop curriculum. This course or component is taking place in schools so that reading specialist candidates are learning how to work with classroom teachers, students, principals, reading specialists, and communities.

These programs are providing supervised experiences that allow reading specialist candidates to work with different types of professional development models and reflect on their own style of leadership. Part of this experience includes preparation in observing and modeling in classrooms and providing feedback to teachers (International Reading Association, 2004b). Literacy faculty are using observations and portfolios to determine reading specialist candidates’ competencies. From the 11 faculty we interviewed, we also discovered that they are knowledgeable about the
leadership role through their own practice in K-12 education and scholarly pursuits. Although some progress has been made in working with school administrators to help them understand the importance of such a leadership experience, more creative work with principals needs to take place. For example, principals might consider providing release time for reading specialist candidates from their own classrooms to give them opportunities to work with and assist other classroom teachers in their own schools or others within the district. Reading specialist exchange programs with other districts can also offer new insights about instruction and assessment for the candidates themselves, the classroom teachers with whom they work, the building-level administrators, and the districts.

As more programs help reading specialists become leaders of literacy, schools will be more inclined to employ reading specialist graduates, as opposed to others who may not be prepared with a literacy background to assume a leadership role. In other words, our graduate programs need to prepare reading specialists with the knowledge, support, and practical experiences for serving as a leader so that they are the ones chosen to be the literacy leaders in their schools.

Although we as a profession do not have the authority to mandate that state departments of education require a course in leadership for reading specialists, we can and are using our own standards through IRA to help with this effort. As IRA continues its work with specific master’s/certification programs to help faculty and administrators subscribe to the standards for reading specialists, research should continue to be conducted on exemplary models and conditions for cultivating the leadership role. Professional organizations such as the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) can provide opportunities for their membership to work with their professional development schools and other partnership schools to collect and disseminate data about the connection between leadership with literacy and student achievement. Profiles of these reading specialists and the work they are doing with teachers can help colleges and universities understand what a leader of a literacy program should look like in order to frame the graduate curriculum and assessment outcomes.

As faculty and administrators prepare for program reviews, they can use the findings from these interviews to help them revamp their coursework. The more information that we share about college and university initiatives in preparing reading specialist candidates for the leadership role, the more likely our chances are for seeing changes to the curriculum that will truly prepare reading specialist candidates to assume leadership roles in the schools.
We do not want to return to a period in time when reading specialists were confined to roles as remedial reading teachers. We now know that the work of reading specialists with teachers is important for moving a school’s literacy program forward (Bean et al., 2003), and we must use our intellectual capital to develop graduate programs that prepare them accordingly.

References


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Portrayals of Bullying in Children’s Picture Books and Implications for Bibliotherapy

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Abstract
Bullying, a serious issue in today’s schools, negatively impacts children. This article summarizes research and emphasizes the need for effective tools, such as bibliotherapy, to deter bullying. To assist professionals in selecting books for bibliotherapy, 38 bully-themed children’s K-3 picture books ranked 1-4 by The Horn Book Guide (HBG) from January 1, 2004 through January 1, 2010 were analyzed. Comparisons were made between the selected books’ portrayals of bullying and aspects of bullying, and bully prevention described in research literature. Information was summarized, including the following details: (a) gender of bully and victim, (b) type of bullying, (c) location of bullying, (d) responses of bystanders and adults, and (e) resolution of bullying problems. Considering this descriptive information, professionals are advised to more selectively recommend books to fit the unique needs of students and encourage desired bullying resolution strategies.

In the Harry Potter series, young Harry is bullied incessantly by his cousin Dudley Dursley. Though Dudley’s bullying drastically decreased after Harry’s magical powers surfaced, Harry endured years of Dudley’s intimidation and derision. Escaping Dudley, Harry entered wizards’ school at Hogwarts, only to face Draco Malfoy’s relentless tormenting (Rowling, 1997). One reason Rowling’s millions of
readers, both children and adults, relate to Harry is because they, or someone close to them, have been bullied. Stemming from this common bond, readers of all ages are incensed by Dudley’s and Malfoy’s bullying.

Bullying is a familiar topic in both layman and professional literature. Thousands of articles, hundreds of books, and dozens of large-scale prevention programs address this hot topic (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). In particular, incidents of bullied victims expressing their revenge in school shootings have galvanized national efforts to mandate school-based bully prevention programs (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). More recently, highly publicized suicides linked to harassment and bullying prompted President Obama to voice his concern, “We’ve got to dispel the myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage, or an inevitable part of growing up. It’s not” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, ¶ 4). Similarly, a 10-page letter from the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights (2010) directed schools to take action in reducing bullying and discriminatory harassment.

**Bullying**

Although bullying occurs in homes and neighborhoods, the bulk of research has focused on bullying in schools (Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). Incidents tend to occur most frequently in locations where adult supervision is limited, such as on the school bus (Allen, Young, Ashbaker, Heaton, & Parkinson, 2003), playground (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000), and in hallways, cafeterias, and bathrooms (Fleming & Towey, 2002; Olweus, 1993). Nevertheless, bullying also occurs in classrooms with teachers present (Parault, Davis, & Pelligrini, 2007; Rivers & Smith, 1994).

Bullying occurs when an individual is subjected, repeatedly over time, to negative actions perpetrated by others who possess greater physical, social, and/or intellectual power (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1993). A variety of participants are involved: (a) bullies (perpetrators), (b) victims (more recently referred to as targets), (c) bully-victims (children who both perpetrate and are victimized by bullying), and (d) bystanders (sideline observers of bullying incidents).

Perpetrators often employ multiple forms of bullying. Physical bullying includes pushing, shoving, taking possessions, or acting in some way to physically harm or control victims by direct physical means. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, ridiculing, or threatening victims. Relational bullying refers to using social power to damage another person’s image and/or relationships with peers. This
includes spreading mean-spirited rumors that humiliate, discount, reject, exclude, and diminish targeted victims. Although physical and verbal bullying is fairly straightforward, relational bullying often happens behind the scenes and is more difficult for adults to detect (Leff, Kupersmidt, Patterson, & Power, 1999). In addition, relational bullying is more commonly associated with preadolescents and adolescents.

Reported rates indicate that between 15 to 30% of schoolchildren are either bullied or bully others (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001). Other studies report 20 to 40% of students are involved in cyberbullying (Stover, 2006), a type of relational aggression in which students send vicious rumors, threats, embarrassing messages, and degrading pictures by email, blogs, and cell phones. However, these rates may greatly underestimate involvement, given that student-to-student sexual harassment (a form of bullying) is reported by approximately 80% of adolescents (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2001).

**Bullying Prevention and Intervention**

In regard to school-wide bully prevention and intervention programs, long term outcomes have failed to demonstrate anticipated results, in particular changing student behavior and reducing bullying (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Therefore, strategic planning must consider narrowing the focus and shaping interventions to address children’s social and emotional needs in classroom settings, as teachers must actively support a safe and inclusive environment (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Frey et al., 2005). Commonly advocated steps include: (a) increasing children’s awareness of bullying behaviors; (b) enforcing clear rules and consequences to deter bullying; (c) providing support and supervision for students; and (d) encouraging and rewarding prosocial behaviors, such as inclusion and cooperation (Olweus, 1993; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Sprague & Walker, 2005). Interventions must also consider the social aspect of bullying: Bullying is a social phenomenon that extends beyond bully-victim dyads (Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003; Parault et al., 2007). Therefore, intervention efforts must focus on two critical ingredients: the overall social tolerance for bullying and the need for effective problem-solving strategies, particularly for victims and bystanders (Craig, Pepler, & Blais, 2007; Davis & Davis, 2007).

Davis and Davis (2007) note the importance of focusing on the broad base of bystanders, strengthening the vast majority of students who may ignore, tacitly
endorse, or actively encourage bullying. These students must be encouraged to step forward and take an active stand against bullying. To this end, bibliotherapy holds promise as a potential tool to strengthen positive, supportive, and inclusive classroom environments, in particular educating and involving bystanders in more actively supporting victims (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008; Jack & Ronan, 2008; Oliver & Young, 1994).

**Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy involves reading a carefully selected book independently or in a group, discussing the story, and applying *lessons learned* in activities that build on the story’s message. A good story invites children to identify with characters, become emotionally invested, express emotions, and apply new insights to personal situations (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984). Mental health professionals use bibliotherapy as a counseling tool to assist individuals in addressing, understanding, and coping with personal challenges (Forgan, 2002). When children are faced with typical developmental challenges such as bullying, parents and teachers are also encouraged to share books that identify coping strategies (Heath, Moulton, Dyches, Prater, & Brown, 2011; Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006). In addition to teaching skills, sharing stories also strengthens adults’ social and emotional support for children, a critical element in alleviating children’s suffering (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Sprague & Walker, 2005).

The body of research investigating the effectiveness of bibliotherapy is not extensive (Jack & Ronan, 2008), nor is it integrated with the massive body of bullying research. However, bibliotherapy has proven effective in treating childhood emotional and behavioral problems, including depression (Kazdin, 2009; Smith, Floyd, Scogin, & Jamison, 1997; Stice, Rohde, Seeley, & Gau, 2008), anxiety disorders (Rapee, Abbott, & Lyneham, 2006), darkness phobia (Santacruz, Mendez, & Sanchez-Meca, 2006), and aggression (Shechtman, 1999, 2000, 2006).

From a mental health perspective, bibliotherapy aligns with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy ([CBT]; Pattison & Harris, 2006). CBT emphasizes the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006). When changing bullying behavior we must also consider changing children’s thoughts and perceptions. This is where bibliotherapy’s potential comes into play. Carefully selected stories open classroom discussion, normalize challenges, reduce isolation, model coping strategies, define behavioral expectations, and offer hope (Heath et al., 2011). Though minimal research supports bibliotherapy in specifically
Portrayals of Bullying in Children's Picture Books

• reducing bullying, researchers and practitioners often recommend children’s books and stories to address this topic (Beane, 2005; Henkin, 2005; Kriedler, 1996; McNamara & McNamara, 1997; Olweus, 1993; Ross, 1996) and to reduce children’s aggressive behavior (Jones, 1991; Shechtman, 1999, 2000, 2006).

Selecting Books for Bibliotherapy

Prior to implementing bibliotherapy, parents, teachers, and professionals are faced with the challenging task of selecting from hundreds of available bully-themed books. This screening process involves reviewing and evaluating books prior to sharing them with children. To increase the potential for students to identify with story characters, selected books should match student characteristics and the specific nature of bullying situations. Professionals should consider multiple variables, such as (a) the characters’ gender, (b) type(s) of bullying, (c) characters’ role in bullying (i.e., bullies, victims, bystanders), (d) adults’ role in the situation, and (e) coping strategies.

Though limited, some research provides useful information regarding available bully-themed children’s books. Oliver and Young (1994) analyzed 22 books written for preadolescents (ages 9-12), describing characters’ use of violence in response to bullying. They also identified major coping and problem-solving methods and strategies. However, their study, published 15 years ago, did not investigate younger children’s picture books.

A more recent article analyzed 25 picture books published between 1995 and 2003 and written for children ages five through eight (Entenmen, Murnen, & Hendricks, 2005). In this study, several important variables regarding bullying situations were analyzed and the researchers found that verbal bullying was the most commonly portrayed form of bullying in the analyzed books, followed by physical bullying. Although bullies were more likely to be portrayed as males, victims were equally represented by males and females. Major characters were more frequently represented as animals rather than human. Most commonly, bullying occurred at school, followed by home. The majority of their sample (22 of the 25 books) included a bystander. However, bystanders’ responses to bullying varied from assisting the victim to encouraging the bully’s attack. Almost half of the books included an adult offering help or intervention and, while problem resolution varied widely, most bullies faced consequences for their behavior, at least to some degree. Although Entenmen et al. (2005) geared their research to elementary teachers’ needs, this
information also helps parents, counselors, and school-based mental health professionals to more strategically select children’s bully-themed literature.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to selectively analyze a current sample of bully-themed picture books and to compare these results with the professional literature on bullying. K-3 children’s picture books were analyzed. This age group was selected for two main reasons. First, young children need strategies to effectively confront and deter bullying (Schwartz et al., 2008). Second, it is important to address bullying at a young age, thus helping prevent the escalation of bullying during middle school. Picture books were selected because they are (a) quickly and easily read by students, parents, teachers, librarians, and school-based mental health professionals; (b) cost effective; (c) readily available in school or public libraries; and (d) written and illustrated for young children. This analysis ultimately provides information for librarians and professionals to more selectively identify bully-themed books for bibliotherapy.

**Method**

**Procedures: Identifying a Sample of Books**

Several criteria were established to determine an adequate yet manageable number of early-elementary (grades K-3) picture books related to bullying. More specifically, selected books were fictional; written in English or translated from other languages into English; and included the word *bully* (or variant of the term bully) in the title, main subject, or keyword in a database or catalog search. Because children’s books quickly go out of print, only recently published books, between January 1, 2004 and January 1, 2010, were selected, ensuring the sample’s books would be readily available in public and school libraries. This sample chronologically extended beyond the previously published books reviewed by Entenmen et al. (2005).

The final criterion for inclusion was based on The Horn Book Guide (HBG) reviews. This guide’s information was consulted for several reasons. First, HBG reviews the largest number of books compared to other major children’s book reviews. Second, HBG reviews books that are widely available. Third, this guide provides a numerical rank for each book and other reviews, though potentially helpful, did not include a quantitative rating system. HBG ranks each book on a scale of
one to six, with one indicating the highest most desirable rating and six indicating the lowest rating. Books ranked one to four were included in this study. Those books with a rating of five (Marginal, seriously flawed, but with some redeeming quality) and six (Unacceptable in style, content, and/or illustration) were excluded. Based on HBG reviews from 1989-2010, almost one third (30%) of reviewed K-3 picture books identified with the key word “bullying” were rated five or six.

In order to identify picture books with a bullying theme published since January 1, 2004, web-based book databases were searched, including the Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database, the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) Online Union Catalog, and the popular book-selling website Amazon.com. From this search, 114 potential books were identified that met the initial criteria. Sixty-two of these books were not reviewed by The Horn Book Guide and were therefore eliminated from the sample. The Horn Book Guide rating was then noted for each of the remaining 52 books. Of these books, 14 received a ranking of five or six and were not further analyzed. The remaining 38 books met all inclusion criteria. These books were included in this study’s sample (see Table 1).

Table 1. Selected Bully-Themed Books and Horn Book Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Horn Book Guide Rating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chen, C. (2004). Guji Guji. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td><em>Horn Book Guide</em> Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lears, L. (2009). <em>Stay away from rat boy!</em> Morton Grove, IL: Whitman.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slavin, D. (2004). <em>Teeny meany</em>. In M. Thomas &amp; C. Cerf (Eds.), Thanks &amp; giving all year long: Marlo Thomas and friends (pp.7-9). New York: Simon &amp; Schuster Books for Young Readers.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wahl, J. (2004). <em>Candy shop</em>. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The *Horn Book Guide* bases ratings on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating the highest most desirable rating and 6 indicating the lowest rating. Books receiving a rating of 1, 2, 3, or 4 were included in this study.*
**Measures**

Selected books were analyzed according to multiple descriptors. Information was summarized in charts (see Table 1 and Appendices A and B). This information offers readily accessible information to assist librarians and professionals in searching for a specific book to match a child’s unique bullying situation. As noted above, Table 1 includes each book’s HBG ranking. Based on these books, Appendices A and B contain coding summaries of analyzed variables, divided into two major categories: information describing characters (Appendix A) and information describing the bullying situation (Appendix B).

Appendix A contains summarized information that describes characters portrayed as bullies and victims. Coding categories included the following descriptors:

(a) whether characters were humans or animals; (b) gender of both bully and victim; (c) race/ethnicity of both bully and victim (only coded when characters were human and if race/ethnicity was evident); (d) whether the bully was older than the victim; and (e) additional traits that may have contributed to victimization (e.g., physical appearance, behavior, disability, personality, being the new kid, a unique interest or hobby, academic performance, or family characteristics).

Appendix B contains summarized information that describes the following categories: (a) type of bullying (physical, verbal, relational, or a combination); (b) setting where bullying occurred; (c) description of perpetrator, an individual or a group; (d) involvement of bystanders and their response(s); (e) involvement of adults and help or intervention they provided; and (f) type of resolution to the bullying situation (e.g., developing self-confidence, being friendly to the bully, ignoring or avoiding the bully, gaining empathy for the bully, using humor, being protected and/or supported by others, and getting revenge on the bully).

Each selected book was read independently by two reviewers and analyzed for identified variables of interest. Reviewers included two school psychology graduate students and two associate professors in the department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education. After the primary author developed a basic coding instrument and instructions, the reviewers were trained. Coders reviewed the coding instrument and discussed instructions on completing each book’s coding. After separately reading and coding three selected books, reviewers discussed questions and clarified aspects that were somewhat ambiguous. After coding details were further specified, reviewers coded the remaining books (two reviewers per each book). In order to reach consensus on all coding categories, coding disagreements were independently evaluated and resolved by a third reviewer.
Research Design

This study involved an exploratory content analysis of selected children’s picture books, specifically on the topic of bullying. The analysis involved coding each book’s content based on predetermined categories reflecting professional literature and basic information of interest to professionals. After coding the sample of selected books, descriptive statistics were calculated (percentage and frequency counts). Data were summarized, providing an overall view of selected books’ content. Information from this selected sample was compared with current research on the topic of bullying and bullying prevention, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement between literary portrayals in selected children’s books and current research.

Results

Analysis of 38 bully-themed children’s picture books offered a view into the type of information portrayed in these books. Authors, publication dates, and publishers for these books are included in Table 1. The analyzed variables were summarized under two categories: (a) demographic variables describing characters, summarized in Appendix A; and (b) variables describing bullying situations, summarized in Appendix B. A discussion of these results follows.

Demographic Variables Describing Characters

Character Portrayal

In almost half of the 38 books (n=16; 42%), characters were portrayed as animals. Twenty books (53%) portrayed characters as humans. Characters in two books (5%) did not fit into the identified categories. The ghosts in The Teeny Tiny Ghost and the Monster (Winters, 2004) were not classified as animal or human, but were coded as other. In the second book, Luther’s Halloween (Meister, 2004), characters were mixed, with a dinosaur in the major character’s role and children in supporting roles.

Gender

In regard to the bully’s gender, the majority was male. Twenty-eight of the 38 books (74%) portrayed male bullies: 22 portrayed one male bully; 3 portrayed a group of male bullies; and 3 portrayed males in mixed gender groups of bullies. Female bullies were portrayed in 9 (24%) of the 38 books: 5 books portrayed one female bully; 1 book portrayed a group of female bullies; and 3 books portrayed females in a mixed gender group of bullies. Four books (11%) portrayed the bully
as a gender-neutral animal or ghost characters (gender not specified and could not be determined by the books’ pictures).

In regard to the victim’s gender, the majority was female. Of the 38 books, 26 (68%) portrayed female victims: 15 portrayed one female victim; 1 portrayed a group of female victims; and 10 portrayed females in mixed gender groups of victims. Male victims were portrayed in 21 of the 38 books (55%): 9 portrayed one male victim; 2 portrayed a group of male victims; and 10 portrayed males in a mixed gender group of victims. One book (3%) portrayed the victim as a gender-neutral character (no gender specified and could not be determined by the book’s illustrations or text).

Race/Ethnicity

The analysis of characters’ race and ethnicity was impacted by the fact that almost half of the books (n=17; 45%) included characters that were animals or ghosts. For the remaining 21 books, race/ethnicity was determined primarily through illustrations and text cues, such as names. Thus, coding this category was somewhat subjective. Of the 21 books with human bullies, 17 books included Caucasian bullies; 1 included a Hispanic bully; 1 included an African American bully; and 1 included a mixed group of ethnic characters portrayed as bullies. One book’s human bully was of undetermined ethnicity (could not be determined based on illustrations and text cues).

Similar to the race/ethnicity breakdown of bullies, 12 of the 21 books with human characters portrayed Caucasian victims; 1 portrayed an African American victim; 1 portrayed a Korean victim; and 1 portrayed an Asian victim. In two books the victim’s ethnicity could not be determined from the illustrations and text. Four books included a mixed group of ethnic characters who were portrayed as victims.

Age

Both pictures and text clues assisted coders in determining the relative ages of story characters. However, the age relationship of characters was often ambiguous, making this coding category difficult to identify in almost half of the books. Due to this ambiguity, 16 books (42%) were not coded in this category. Accounting for the remaining 22 books, 15 books (39%) portrayed bullies and victims within the same age range; 7 books (18%) included a bully that was clearly older than the victim; and none of the books included a bully younger than the victim.
Victim’s Personal Characteristics

In addition to gender, race/ethnicity, and age, reviewers identified other personal characteristics that may have contributed to the victim becoming a target of bullying. The most common characteristic of victims was being shorter and smaller. In 17 of the 38 books (45%) the victim was much smaller than the bully. Four books (11%) included other physical characteristics of victims that bullies preyed upon, including being overweight, too tall, and too thin. Eight books (21%) portrayed bullies that targeted individuals with less social power. In stories with animal characters, less social power was associated with being lower on the food chain. In seven books (18%) victims appeared to be targeted because of distinctive personality traits or behaviors (e.g., shyness, hyper-sensitivity). Other traits of victims included wearing unique clothing ($n=2; 5\%$) and being the new kid in town ($n=3; 8\%$).

Variables Describing Bullying Situations

Type of Bullying

Bullying behaviors were classified as either physical (e.g., hitting, taking possessions), verbal (e.g., teasing, name-calling), or relational (e.g., excluding, ostracizing, gossiping). Several books in this study included more than one type of bullying: The most commonly portrayed was verbal bullying, present in 30 of the 38 books (79%). Physical bullying was present in 24 books (63%) and relational bullying was observed in 7 books (18%).

Setting

The location of the bullying was classified in general categories, including home, school, neighborhood, and other place (most often the animal’s natural habitat) and some books included bullying incidents in more than one setting. Bullying was portrayed most often in school settings ($n=17; 45\%$), followed by neighborhood ($n=12; 32\%$), other place ($n=9; 24\%$), and home ($n=3; 8\%$). Two books (5%) did not designate or describe a location. Of the 17 books that portrayed bullying in school settings, bullying was most commonly portrayed in classrooms ($n=10$) and outside the school building, such as on the playground or in front of the school ($n=10$). Bullying also occurred in school hallways ($n=3$), lunchrooms ($n=4$), pools, gymnasiums, and locker rooms ($n=3$), and school buses ($n=2$).

Bullying Group

Bullying was most frequently perpetrated by one individual rather than a group. The bully acted alone in 28 of the 38 books (74%). Nine books (24%)
included bullying perpetrated by two or more individuals. One book was unclear as to whether the bullying was perpetrated by an individual or a group.

**Bystander Roles**

Of the 38 books, 25 (66%) included one or more bystanders who witnessed the bullying incident and responded in some way. Bystander responses were classified into six general categories with each of the 25 books containing one or more responses: (a) sticking up for the victim in the presence of the bully ($n=11, 44\%$); (b) indirect support of the victim (e.g., consoling, befriending; $n=10, 40\%$); (c) ignoring the bully and doing nothing ($n=10, 40\%$); (d) laughing or smiling in support of the bully ($n=3, 12\%$); (e) joining in with the bully ($n=3, 12\%$); and (f) telling an adult authority ($n=2, 8\%$).

**Adult Roles**

In 23 books (61% of the sample), adult characters’ responses to bullying were not included. However, one book—*Not So Tall for Six* (Aston, 2008)—included memories of family sayings and traditions that guided the victim’s responses. Numerous books did not have adult characters, especially books that featured animal characters in their natural habitat.

Of the 16 books that included adults’ responses to bullying, most included more than one adult response. Nine books included teacher responses, eight included parent responses, two included neighborhood adults’ responses, one included a school playground supervisor’s response, and one included the bully’s mother’s response. The most commonly observed adult response was attending to and offering emotional support to the victim ($n=11$). These behaviors included attending to the victim by listening and offering encouraging words. Seven books portrayed adults teaching skills and strategies to the victim. Three books portrayed adults who encouraged friendship and reconciliation between the victim and bully and five books included adults correcting the bully’s behavior (e.g., discipline, verbal redirection). In *Stay Away from Rat Boy* (Lears, 2009), after disciplining the bully (time-out), the teacher tried to teach the bully new behaviors. In one book, the adult directed the bully to immediately stop bullying others. Also observed in 3 of the 16 books, adults ignored the bullying and did nothing. Only one book involved the teacher actively encouraging classroom support to deter bullying — *Bullies Never Win* (Cuyler, 2009).
Resolutions to Bullying

Resolutions to bullying incidents were classified into one or more of 11 categories. Most books included more than one type of resolution. The most common resolution was for the victim to receive some sort of support (direct or indirect) from others. This was observed in 29 (76%) of the 38 books. The next most common resolution was for the bully to stop the bullying behavior. This occurred in over half of the 38 books (n=24, 63%). Of these 24 books, eight books demonstrated that although the bully stopped, there was no realization of wrongdoing. Thirteen books demonstrated that after the bully stopped, he or she realized wrongdoing. The remaining three books did not indicate the bully’s disposition regarding their wrongdoing. It is important to note that in 14 (37%) of the 38 books, the bully’s behavior was not clearly extinguished. In other words, the bullying would most likely continue at some point in the future. Another common resolution occurring in 61% of the books (n=23) was that the victim demonstrated increased self-confidence in their ability to cope with bullying behavior. Increased self-confidence and support from others commonly occurred in tandem.

Other resolutions were much less common than the previous three. Sixteen books (42%) ended with the victim being friendly to the bully. Nine books (24%) ended with the victim seeking retaliation (revenge). Other less common resolutions involved the victim taking such actions as showing empathy for the bully (n=6, 16%), ignoring or avoiding the bully (n=6, 16%), using humor to diffuse the situation (n=5, 13%), confronting the bully about their wrongdoing (n=2; 5%), and threatening to tell the teacher (n=1, 3%). Three books (8%) ended with the bully avoiding the victim or running away from the victim (e.g., in Coyote Raid in Cactus Canyon [Arnosky, 2005], a group of wolf bullies harassed smaller wildlife until they were scared away by a rattlesnake not involved in the conflict).

Discussion

The 38 books analyzed in this study included a diverse portrayal of bullying incidents and situations. When compared with the current research literature on bullying, some representations were more accurately portrayed than others. Overall, several aspects of bullying were realistically portrayed, laying the groundwork for readers to relate with the stories’ characters and situations. For example, the increased representation of male perpetrators (more male bullies than female bullies) aligns with the research indicating boys are more likely than girls to bully others (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001). Likewise, the
research literature indicates that boys are also more likely to be targeted by bullies. This trend, however, was not reflected in this analysis.

Almost half of the books contained animal characters. The remaining books were overrepresented with Caucasian victims and bullies. When selecting books for bibliotherapy, professionals may want to consider the ethnic makeup of their audience, matching books’ story characters to their audience of children. This will increase the likelihood of children identifying with story characters.

The high frequency of verbal bullying found in this analysis aligns with research prevalence rates, identifying this type of bullying as the most commonly observed (AAUW, 2001). The sample’s low incidence of relational bullying also corresponds with research suggesting this type of bullying is difficult for adults to recognize and more frequently employed by older children (Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006).

According to recent meta-analyses (Smith et al., 2004; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007), it is unclear which strategies are best for addressing school-wide bully prevention. However, one of the most commonly advocated strategies is for adults and peers to offer support for victims (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Olweus, 1993; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). In sync with this commonly recommended strategy, in 29 of the 38 books victims received direct and/or indirect support from others. Professionals who want to encourage bystanders’ social support for the victim should select books that model this behavior. In particular, Davis and Davis (2007) emphasize the importance of focusing on the strength of bystanders, encouraging classmates to actively support victims, taking a stand against bullying.

Another common resolution strategy involved the victim developing self-confidence and/or other skills to stand up for him or herself, demonstrating an active rather than passive response to bullying. When providing anti-bullying tactics to parents and educators, much of the research literature advocates such a strategy. In fact, Brewster and Railsback (2001) state that the primary goal of bullying intervention should be helping victims develop appropriate assertiveness and conflict resolution skills. Although practitioners offer advice on how to counter bullying, more research is needed to determine which strategies are actually the most effective in deterring and eliminating bullying. Thus, because research is inconclusive, strategies presented in this analysis cannot be judged against conclusive research findings. However, professionals should determine which strategies are most acceptable in their settings and utilize books that support the identified strategies.
Research indicates bullying occurs most frequently at school (Fleming & Towey, 2002). Although less than half of the analyzed books portrayed bullying in school settings, schools were the most common setting, particularly in classrooms and on school grounds. As noted by Olweus (1993), bullying in schools most often occurs in places with limited adult supervision. Aligning with this research, adults were not involved in over half of the books’ bullying situations (n=22, 58%). Research also indicates that the most frequent location of elementary school bullying is on the playground (Olweus, 1993; Rivers & Smith, 1994). In this sample, only one fifth of books included playground bullying.

Several books portrayed disturbing responses to bullying. For example, 9 of the 38 books portrayed victims seeking revenge or retaliation. Two books ended with a feeling of “justice served,” victims satisfied and humored that bullies were scared or chased away by someone (or something) not affiliated with the victim. “Getting even” in some way or scaring the bully runs counter to school-endorsed messages. When selecting books, adults must carefully review the story’s ending and how bullying situations are resolved. The story’s core message should align with what adults want children to learn and books should model desired behaviors.

Another disconcerting element in many of the selected books was a lack of realism. Several books included a magical resolution to the bullying problem. In Ella, the Elegant Elephant (D’Amico & D’Amico, 2004), a hat inflating to the size of a parachute gently floats the bully and victim from a precarious situation to safety; in Ten-Gallon Bart (Crummel, 2006) the bully coughs up all the objects he has rudely eaten, making him feel better and no longer wanting to bully the local townspeople; and in Luther’s Halloween (Meister, 2004) the victim’s pet dinosaur chases off the bully who was stealing Halloween candy. Children who are dealing with bullying situations are unlikely to benefit from thinking that bullying problems are resolved with magical interventions or fairy-tale endings. This type of ending ignores the importance of children developing coping strategies and critical skills to address and deter bullying.

Three books portrayed unrealistic resolutions: The victim and bully instantly become close friends. These books included Plantzilla Goes to Camp (Nolen, 2006), Jungle Bullies (Kroll, 2006), and Hats! (Luthardt, 2004). Sending a message to children that instant friendship springs forth from a bullying situation may strengthen unrealistic expectations that clash with real world outcomes. When identifying books for bibliotherapy, stories should model realistic and desirable resolutions to bullying situations.
It should also be noted that the concept of bullying did not have the same meaning across stories as bullying situations varied widely. This was especially true for books involving animal characters in their natural habitats, such as in Coyote Raid in Cactus Canyon (Arnosky, 2005) and Who’s Got Game? The Lion or the Mouse? (Morrison & Morrison, 2004). In such cases, the bully was an animal higher up on the food chain, possessing more power than the other animals. When animal bullies harassed their victims, it was often a predator-prey interaction. Children would most likely relate differently to stories in which books portrayed bullying between children. When selecting books for bibliotherapy, professionals should consider scenarios and details that facilitate children identifying with story characters.

Limitations

Though efforts were made to select a representative, adequate sample and to conduct a sufficient analysis, there are several limitations to this study. First, only K-3 picture books were included in the sample. Second, in order to reduce the selection to a manageable size and ensure quality and availability of selected books, inclusion criteria excluded a large number of books. Third, several books contained ambiguous information about characters, bullying situations, and resolutions to bullying problems, which might have reduced coding accuracy.

Another limitation is that HBG historically gives lower ratings to didactic books that may be identified for bibliotherapy (e.g., the long-running Berenstain Bear series by Jan and Mike Berenstain). Of the 74 Berenstain Bear books reviewed by HBG since 1989, only 3 received a rating better than five. In other words, 71 of the 74 reviewed books in this popular series received ratings of five or six (the lowest ratings offered). Though not positively rated by HBG, in actuality this type of book may fit in a classroom curriculum that focuses on directly teaching social skills to deter bullying. In addition, books such as Nobody Knew What to Do (McCain, 2001) and Just Kidding (Ludwig, 2006) were rated five by HBG, yet these books are routinely listed on libraries’ bibliotherapy lists and frequently endorsed by teachers and school-based mental health practitioners.

Future Research

Several potential areas for future research are suggested. First, bully-themed books written for older children and adolescents should undergo a similar content analysis. Because bullying is especially problematic in middle and high school, analyzing, summarizing, and identifying effective young adult literature for this age
group would be particularly helpful. Another area of future research would involve surveying professionals and/or parents who might use bibliotherapy to address the topic of bullying. Surveys could solicit their impressions of selected bully-themed books and their impressions of how effective these stories are in deterring bullying and supporting children who struggle with it. Likewise, a similar study could survey children’s perceptions of these important topics. Future research could also analyze the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in changing attitudes and reducing bullying behavior by comparing group behaviors of a treatment group (participating in bibliotherapy) and control group (not participating in bibliotherapy). Participants’ attitudes and behavioral changes could be tracked over time.

Conclusion and Implications for Professionals

In this study, children’s K-3 picture books (N=38) were analyzed regarding information about bullying, including characteristics of bullies and victims, descriptions of bullying behaviors, where bullying occurs, and how others respond to bullying. Optimally, this information will assist librarians and professionals in more selectively identifying bully-themed books for bibliotherapy with young children. Professionals are advised to carefully consider books’ content and core messages prior to sharing them with children. Most importantly, stories should model desired behaviors and align with school rules. For example, Little Zizi (Lenain, 2008) was rated 4 by HBG and included in this analysis, yet may be considered inappropriate for many children in one-on-one settings and even more inappropriate for group and classroom storytelling. A young boy’s private body parts and the pictures and images presented in this book could increase teasing, rather than help children develop coping strategies to address bullying. Prior to sharing stories with children and to ensure a good fit with the intended audience, adults should always carefully review books for content and core message.

Reading carefully selected bully-themed stories with children offers a cost effective and quick strategy to initiate conversations about bullying. Additionally, classroom reading helps teachers strengthen bystander support for victims and builds proactive efforts against bullying. When selecting books for bibliotherapy, professionals may want to consider the unique makeup of their audience, matching story characters to the children who will be listening to the story. This may increase the likelihood of children identifying with story characters.
References


Kazdin, A. E. (2009). In high-risk adolescents, cognitive behavioural therapy reduced depression at 6 months more than assessment alone but did not differ from bibliotherapy or supportive-expressive therapy. *Evidence-Based Medicine, 14*(2), 51.


### Appendix A

#### Selected Books: Description of Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Type of Character</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Bully’s age Compared to Victim</th>
<th>Traits of Victim (if specified)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucy and the Bully</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Same age, artistic, admired by classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Play’s the Thing</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Same age, not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coyote Raid in Cactus Canyon</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown, smaller size, less social power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Laugh</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown, less social power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not So Tall for Six</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age, smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bully Blockers Club</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Same age, smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Get So Hungry</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Same age, larger size (overweight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinduli</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Older, unique appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guji Guji</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Older, smaller size, unique behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Make Friends with a Giant</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Male group</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Same age, extra tall, new kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough Jim</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male and Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Older, smaller size, younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten-Gallon Bart</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown, not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies Never Win</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age, less social power, smaller size (thin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella, the Elegant Elephant</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Same age, smaller size, new kid, unique personality and clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky and the Lamb</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown, smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungle Bullies</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male group</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown, smaller size less social power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Hens and a Rooster</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female group</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown, not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay away from Rat Boy!</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age, less social power, easily intimidated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Zizi</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age, less social power, small penis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Title</td>
<td>Type of Character</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
<td>Bully’s age Compared to Victim</td>
<td>Traits of Victim (if specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurty Feelings</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hats!</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran's Halloween</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s Got Game? The Lion or the Mouse?</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown Less social power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble at the Dinosaur Café</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freckleface Strawberry and the Dodgeball Bully</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Unknown Smaller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantzilla Goes to Camp</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age Smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ker-splash!</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Older Smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrtle</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo-yo Man</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Older Smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon and the Jade Bracelet</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Older New student, less social power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is It Because?</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Unknown Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitting Nell</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar: The Big Adventure of a Little Sock Monkey</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age Smaller size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Teeny Meany,” In Thanks &amp; Giving All Year Long</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Unknown Size (overweight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizette’s Green Sock</td>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Unknown Smaller size, personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy Shop</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Unknown Asian</td>
<td>Unknown Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby and Bubbles</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Same age Unique behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Teeny Tiny Ghost and the Monster</td>
<td>Ghosts</td>
<td>Mixed group</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Same age Smaller size, personality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B

**Description of Bullying Situation, Character Involvement, and Outcome**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book title</th>
<th>Type of bullying</th>
<th>Setting of bullying</th>
<th>Bystander involvement</th>
<th>Adult involvement</th>
<th>Outcome or resolution(s) to bullying problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lucy and the Bully                  | Verbal, Physical | School: classroom, grounds | Ignore, act unaware | Victim’s mother asks questions, listens, calls teacher; Bully’s mother corrects bully | Victim supported by mother  
Empathy for bully  
Bully stops, with realization of wrong  
Uses humor  
Friendly to bully |
| A Play’s the Thing                  | Verbal, Physical | School: classroom | Sticks up for victim  
Indirect support  
Tells adult | Teacher corrects bully, encourages friendship | Friendly to bully  
Victim supported by others  
Bully stops, with realization of wrong |
| Coyote Raid in Cactus Canyon        | Physical         | Other               | Ignores it  
Also victimized | No adult involvement | Bully chased away by another  
Victim supported by others |
| The Last Laugh                      | Verbal           | Not described       | No bystanders         | No adult involvement | Revenge, retaliation  
Increased self-confidence  
Victim supported by others |
| Not So Tall for Six                 | Verbal           | School: playground | 1 friend’s hand on victim’s shoulder (indirect support)  
2 ignore, whisper to each other | Family traditions (memories) | Uses humor  
Empathy for bully  
Friendly to bully  
Bully stops |
| The Bully Blockers Club             | Verbal, Physical | School: classroom, hallway, playground, lunchroom | Ignores it  
Sticks up for victim  
Indirect support  
Also victimized | Parent, teacher, and playground supervisor: Correct bully, support victim, teach victim | Friendly to bully  
Increased self-confidence  
Ignores/avoids  
Uses humor  
Victim supported by others  
Bully stops, with realization of wrong |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book title</th>
<th>Type of bullying</th>
<th>Setting of bullying</th>
<th>Bystander involvement</th>
<th>Adult involvement</th>
<th>Outcome or resolution(s) to bullying problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I Get So Hungry</em></td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>School: bus, classroom</td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Uses humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Laughs with bully</td>
<td>Indirect support: Smiles with victim, talks about healthy eating</td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal putdown to bully</td>
<td>Ignores verbal bullying (name-calling)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pinduli</em></td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guji Guji</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Relational</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How to Make Friends With a Giant</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Relational</td>
<td>Neighborhood; School: bus, classroom, playground</td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Friendly to bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Also victimized</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ignores/avoids Support from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tough Jim</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>School: classroom</td>
<td>Comforts victim</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Classmates support victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td>Supports victim</td>
<td>Bully stops and runs (embarrassed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Verbally confronts bully</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ten-Gallon Bart</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Also victimized</td>
<td></td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bullies Never Win</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Relational</td>
<td>School: classroom, cafeteria, playground</td>
<td>Ignores it</td>
<td>Parent supports victim, teaches victim; Teacher teaches class to ignore bullies</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Laughs with bully</td>
<td></td>
<td>Threatens to tell teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td></td>
<td>Verbally confronts bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourages victim to stand up to bully</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book title</td>
<td>Type of bullying</td>
<td>Setting of bullying</td>
<td>Bystander involvement</td>
<td>Adult involvement</td>
<td>Outcome or resolution(s) to bullying problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ella, the Elegant Elephant</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Physical, Relational</td>
<td>School: classroom, playground</td>
<td>Laughs/smiles Joins in bullying</td>
<td>Parent and teacher scolds bully, supports victim, teach victim</td>
<td>Friendly to bully Increased self-confidence Empathy for bully Victim supported by others Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rocky and the Lamb</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Bully chased away by another Friendly to bully Victim supported by others Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jungle Bullies</em></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>Parent supports victim, teaches victim, encourages friendship</td>
<td>Friendly to bully Increased self-confidence Victim supported by others Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Four Hens and a Rooster</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation Increased self-confidence Victim supported by others Bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stay away from Rat Boy!</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>School: playground, classroom, hall, cafeteria</td>
<td>Also victimized Avoids bully</td>
<td>Teacher disciplines bully (time out), teaches bully</td>
<td>Empathy for bully Friendly to bully Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Little Zizi</em></td>
<td>Verbal, Relational</td>
<td>School: pool dressing room, Neighborhood</td>
<td>Joins in bullying</td>
<td>Teacher ignores (victim’s memory) calls victim a “dimwit”</td>
<td>Victim supported by bystander Bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book title</td>
<td>Type of bullying</td>
<td>Setting of bullying</td>
<td>Bystander involvement</td>
<td>Adult involvement</td>
<td>Outcome or resolution(s) to bullying problem</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurty Feelings</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Ignores it</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Friendly to bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empathy for bully</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hats!</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Friendly to bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther’s Halloween</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Also victimized</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased support from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s Got Game? The Lion or the Mouse?</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Friendly to bully</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble at the Dinosaur Café</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Tells adult or other authority</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Also victimized</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freckleface Strawberry and the Dodgeball Bully</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>School: gymnasium</td>
<td>Also victimized</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frightened bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friendly to bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantzilla Goes to Camp</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Sticks up for victim</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friendly to bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
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<td>Victim supported by others</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bully stops, with realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book title</td>
<td>Type of bullying</td>
<td>Setting of bullying</td>
<td>Bystander involvement</td>
<td>Adult involvement</td>
<td>Outcome or resolution(s) to bullying problem</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ker-splash!</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Revenge, retaliation increased self-confidence support from others bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrtle</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>Parent and other adult support victim teach victim</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence ignores/avoids uses humor victim supported by others bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yo-yo Man</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>School, classroom, playground</td>
<td>Ignores it</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence bully stops, with no realization of wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon and the Jade Bracelet</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>School cafeteria, playground</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>Teacher supports victim</td>
<td>Teacher confronts bully's false story victim supported by others bracelet returned to victim increased self-confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is It Because?</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Not described</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>No resolution empathy for bully victim supported by others</td>
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<td>Knitting Nell</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>School playground</td>
<td>No bystanders</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Friendly to bully increased self-confidence victim supported by others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oscar: The Big Adventure of a Little Sock Monkey</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>School hallway, grounds</td>
<td>Sticks up for victim Also victimized</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Ignores/avoids victim supported by others</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Setting of bullying</td>
<td>Bystander involvement</td>
<td>Adult involvement</td>
<td>Outcome or resolution(s) to bullying problem</td>
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<td>“Teeny Meany.” In Thanks &amp; Giving All Year Long</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Ignores it</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>No resolution Friendly to bully</td>
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<td>Lizette’s Green Sock</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Neighborhood, Home</td>
<td>Indirect support</td>
<td>Parent supports victim, teaches victim</td>
<td>Ignores/avoids Victim supported by others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candy Shop</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Indirect support</td>
<td>Neighborhood adult supports victim, teaches victim</td>
<td>Victim supported by others</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ruby and Bubbles</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical, Relational</td>
<td>Neighborhood, Home</td>
<td>Laughs/smiles Joins in bullying Indirect support</td>
<td>Parent ignores it, encourages friendship</td>
<td>No resolution Increased self-confidence Victim supported by others</td>
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<td>The Teeny Tiny Ghost and the Monster</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Neighborhood, School: classroom</td>
<td>Ignores it</td>
<td>No adult involvement</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence Ignores/avoids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**About the Author**
Emily Moulton serves as a School Psychologist in Colorado Springs. Melissa Allen Heath, Mary Anne Prater, and Tina Taylor Dyches are faculty members in Brigham Young University’s Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education. All authors share a passion for children’s literature and its potential to change attitudes and behavior.
The Three-Phase Reading Comprehension Intervention (3-RCI): A Support for Intermediate-Grade Word Callers

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Connie J. Armitage, Ed.D.
Diane H. Nettles, Ph.D.
Christine Peterson, Ed.D.
California University of Pennsylvania, California, PA

Abstract

This article describes results of a reading comprehension intervention for students with adequate decoding but poor comprehension skills. Five teachers and 25 students in grades 3-5 from two rural public schools participated in this naturalistic experimental research study. Teachers met with identified students in a small group setting for 30 intervention sessions. The intervention involved explicit teaching and gradual release of instruction in three phases: metacognitive strategies, comprehension strategies, and peer-led discussions. To measure growth in reading comprehension, the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) was administered as the pre- and posttest and analyzed through t-test comparisons. Interactive teaching is characterized by a dynamic flow of instruction with a powerful use of questioning used as a tool to assist students in understanding what they read. Recitative teaching is marked by static interactions that did not change across treatment intervention. Subsequently, the groups receiving the interactive instruction were compared to those receiving recitative instruction, and growth in reading comprehension for each group was compared. While all students gained in reading comprehension, students in the interactive teaching groups gained more in reading comprehension than those in the recitative teaching groups. Instructional implications of this research are presented and discussed, providing suggestions for teaching reading comprehension.
We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us... Whether we do it depends on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far (Allington & Cunningham, 1996, p. 24).

Theoretical Background and Significance

In our work with preservice and inservice teachers of intermediate and middle school grades, we encounter a consistent challenge that teachers face: students who can read but cannot comprehend. These word callers, or students who can fluently call out words without knowing what the text says, seem to be more prevalent in the later years of elementary school (Meisinger, Bradley, Schwanenflugel, Kuhn, & Morris, 2009; Stanovich, 1986). Typical instruction in primary grades, in which teachers focus on word-level skills, often results in strong word recognition skills at the expense of comprehension abilities. A study conducted by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) to evaluate the success of the federal Reading First Initiative found that although many students became proficient decoders of text, corresponding gains in reading comprehension were not realized (National Center for Education Evaluation, 2008). Thus, students often enter fourth grade and beyond with the ability to read words relatively fluently but without the necessary strategies to comprehend grade-level materials (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Snow, 2002).

Even though word recognition is a necessary condition for successful reading, it is not sufficient. The National Reading Panel (NRP) identified a set of best-practice strategies that readers can use to enhance their understanding of text (2000), and concluded that reading comprehension instruction must accompany word identification strategies so students can understand what they read. Specifically, direct and explicit strategy instruction to develop these strategies is effective, especially for at-risk students (Snow, 2002).

While the literature is clear that this type of instruction can benefit word callers, elementary teachers have had difficulty using explicit comprehension strategy instruction for many years (Durkin, 1978-79; Pressley 2000; Pressley, 2002a). In fact, Walker (2009) contends that of all the components of reading instruction, comprehension is the most difficult to teach. Therefore, in addition to the need for intervention, studies clearly indicate that teacher knowledge of how to teach and implement comprehension strategies is a crucial variable in student achievement. Yet many instructional reform efforts lack a focus on development of teacher knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Thus, teachers need new knowledge and support as they implement methods for teaching reading comprehension strategies to their students.
Gradual Release Model

Research on comprehension instruction offers guidance for designing instruction that capitalizes on the constructive nature of making meaning. Such instruction requires a change from a teacher-directed perspective toward a more self-regulated, student-centered process approach (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In fact, a common three-phase cycle of instruction can be identified (Block & Pressley, 2003; Duffy, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In describing this cycle, Pearson and Gallagher (1983) coined the term gradual release to capture the recursive, interactive flow of comprehension instruction. First, the cycle begins with the teacher’s explicit strategy instruction, in which he or she models and explains to students how to use essential comprehension strategies. During the second phase, called scaffolded support, the teacher offers varying degrees of support as students practice the strategy. The gradual fading of this support leads to the final phase, called independent application, which is when students are able to use comprehension strategies while reading on their own. An integral part of the cycle is that each phase is mediated through social interaction in the form of dialogue between the teacher and students as well as among the students themselves.

The gradual release model represents a journey between two extremes, or “planned obsolescence,” according to Pearson & Gallagher (1983, p. 338). The movement from reliance on teacher modeling to the students’ independent use of strategies requires an appropriate level of support; the teacher must observe and respond to informal feedback cues from the students. A conversational dialogue occurs when students begin to practice using comprehension strategies as they think aloud about their strategy use, while the teacher responds with additional think-alouds and support.

While such dialogue appears to be natural and easy, the difficulty lies in providing just the right amount of support as the teacher must enable students to practice using the strategy, but not provide so much support that students remain unchallenged. The amount of support gradually fades until eventually students can perform the task independently.

Conceptual Framework for the Intervention Model

Research identifies three key types of instruction that benefit students who are poor at comprehending. First, studies indicate that many students who cannot comprehend text are generally unaware of the kind of thinking necessary for comprehension; that is, they lack the metacognitive skills necessary to think about what they are reading (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Pressley, 2002b), and will likely benefit
from instruction in metacognitive strategies (Tregaskes & Daines, 1989; Camahalen, 2006; Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007). Second, an abundance of research shows that the reciprocal teaching framework (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) provides necessary explicit comprehension strategy instruction, using four reading comprehension strategies that students apply while reading: predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying. Third, research demonstrates that students understand text better when given the opportunity to discuss that text with their peers (Maloch, 2002). However, we have found no studies that examine the effects of these three key types of instruction — metacognitive strategies, reciprocal teaching, and peer-led discussions — applied to the recursive gradual release model and embedded within one intervention model.

Therefore, the purpose of our study is two-fold: (a) to investigate the effectiveness of a reading intervention program that integrates all three of these key types of instruction and (b) to gain insight into the particular instructional nuances that lead to comprehension gains for students. The model incorporates teaching through three phases, one for each of the key types of instruction, where each phase is grounded in the recursive gradual release instruction cycle described above. This model, the Three-Phase Reading Comprehension Intervention (3-RCI), was previously developed in a classroom setting, and seemed very successful based on informal classroom assessments (Diehl, 2005). Therefore, with these encouraging results, we tested the model for efficacy in other public school classrooms with other teachers. This study was guided by two questions:

1. What does the instructional dialogue look like when teachers implement the instructional phases of 3-RCI?
2. Does the implementation of 3-RCI impact students’ ability to comprehend grade-level text?

Method

Setting and Participants

We conducted this study in two elementary schools within a rural school district. The schools serve students primarily from lower socioeconomic status, and both schools have the same principal. The participants in this study included five classroom teachers and twenty-five students in grades 3-5. Three students were in fifth grade, eight in fourth grade, and fourteen were in third grade. The students were mixed in gender—there were eight boys and six girls in third grade, four boys and four girls in fourth grade, and one boy and two girls in fifth grade. The
participant selection process is described below. Intervention occurred during the regular instructional day, and each participating teacher scheduled her thirty intervention sessions according to the classroom schedule. Therefore, each intervention session took place in the students’ classroom with their classroom teacher.

Materials

The teachers had a variety of sets of leveled readers in their classrooms that were provided through district funding and approved for use by the school board. Each set of leveled readers addressed instructional levels from grades 1-6. For each intervention session, teachers selected books from this set of leveled readers, which enabled them to provide instruction using reading materials that matched each student’s comprehension instructional level.

Measures

Our study allowed for a naturalistic, experimental research design model where all participating teachers received training in the methodology for teaching readers to comprehend. In this research model, learning and instruction are systematically studied in a natural context, leading to new theories and refined pedagogy for practitioners. This type of research model is very appropriate when studying situations in real-world settings, particularly when looking at variability across classrooms (Barab, Dodge, Thomas, Jackson, & Tuzun, 2007; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003).

We answered the first question of the study — examining instructional dialogue — by reviewing tapes of the intervention sessions as the five participating teachers audiotaped selected sessions while they were teaching. Then we transcribed and reviewed these audiotapes and using deductive analysis, identified a redundancy of patterns and trends in the instructional dialogue. We used this information to develop a coding system, which listed the common instructional elements across all five participating teachers. Once a common coding system was established, lesson transcriptions were reread to identify specific instructional elements found within the instructional dialogue of each individual teacher.

We established triangulation by collecting data on numerous participants in a variety of settings, across multiple collection points, and by using different data collection tools. Additionally, we used these data to clarify and further explain the results of the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001), enabling examination of recommendations for teaching reading comprehension. This combination provided triangulation of data in quantitative, qualitative, and ethnographic forms (Patton, 2002).
A single group, pretest-posttest design (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2001) measured the effect of 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005) implementation, which is the second question of the study. In this design, we pretested the student group, and followed that with the thirty-session intervention, after which we administered a posttest to assess change in the independent variable. We used the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001), which offers several passages on each grade level for the initial screening for participating student selection, as well as for the pre- and post-test measures of oral reading and comprehension. Assessment guidelines in the QRI-3 report comprehension at three levels: independent, instructional, or frustration. A reader answering at least 90% of the questions accurately is considered to be on the independent level for comprehension; a reader answering between 70-89% of the questions accurately is considered to be on the instructional level for comprehension; and a reader answering less than 70% of the questions accurately is considered to be on the frustration level for comprehension. Word recognition accuracy is scored as a percentage. It is expected that a student with average achievement can read his or her grade-level passage with at least 90% accuracy and score on the instructional level for comprehension.

Students were selected based upon a screening assessment conducted by the classroom teachers. Using daily observations and assessments that occurred as part of instruction and assessment in reading, teachers selected individual students and administered one passage of the QRI-3 as a screening instrument. Specifically, teachers administered a grade level narrative passage of the QRI-3 to assess word recognition and comprehension. Those students who passed the grade-level word recognition criteria but did not pass the grade-level comprehension criteria were chosen and asked to participate in the study. Following a similar study (Johnson-Glenberg, 2000), students were selected to participate if they read their grade-level passage with at least 90% accuracy, but scored on the frustration level for comprehension. Therefore, we selected and asked only those students who demonstrated the ability to read grade-level text with fluent word recognition but did not demonstrate the ability to comprehend what they read.

Once we identified participating students, we administered further passages of the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) as a pretest measure to determine grade-level comprehension. For this administration, we used the screening level as the starting point, and worked backwards in grade levels until participants scored at least instructional for comprehension. For example, one fifth-grade student who was selected for participation read the fifth-grade passage to her teacher with 97% accuracy, but scored on the frustration level for comprehension. Then, to collect pretest measures for this student, we administered the fourth-grade passage, and the student
read it with 98% accuracy but still scored on the frustration level for comprehension. The third-grade passage was administered, and the student read it with 97% accuracy and scored on the independent level for comprehension. Thus, we stopped pretesting at the third-grade level for this student because the comprehension score was at least on the instructional level.

Following the thirty-session intervention, we used different passages of the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) following the same procedure. We began posttesting at the students’ actual grade levels and worked backwards in grade levels until reaching at least an instructional level for comprehension. Table 1 shows the comprehension deficit of each participant at pretesting and the gains in comprehension demonstrated at posttesting.

Table 1. Individual Student Grade-Level Performance on the QRI-3 with Identified Teaching Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Deficit at pretesting</th>
<th>Deficit at posttesting</th>
<th>Gain pre- to posttesting</th>
<th>Teaching style</th>
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<tr>
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</table>
Procedures

For this study, we provided one session of direct staff development as well as ongoing follow-up support to the five inservice teachers who implemented 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005) in their classrooms. In the initial staff development session, we presented the gradual release method of instruction and demonstrated the use of mental modeling in which the teacher shares, with students, his or her thinking when interacting with text. In follow-up visits, we observed intervention sessions and gave feedback to the participating teachers. The implementation period lasted six months, from January to June. Teachers held 30 sessions in small groups with participants and provided explicit, targeted instruction in the three types of instruction associated with this model: metacognition, comprehension strategy instruction, and peer-led discussions.

During Phase One (five sessions), teachers taught metacognitive strategies. The goal of this phase was very basic: to demonstrate that reading is about thinking. To do this, we adapted Tovani’s (2000) teaching strategies, in which she described “voices in your head” to adolescent word callers (p. 45). In this phase, teachers described two kinds of voices that go on in readers’ heads. One voice, termed the “Conversation Voice,” helps readers relate to the text and remember what is read. The other voice, which we modified and termed the “Blah, Blah, Blah” voice, strays readers away from the text. During Phase One instruction, teachers read aloud and modeled the conversations happening in their heads and assisted students to develop awareness by discussing these conversations happening while reading. Additionally teachers taught students how to turn off the “Blah, Blah, Blah” voice by applying specific metacognitive strategies such as rereading, reading ahead, and asking questions.

The goal of Phase Two (15 sessions) was to give the students tools to aid in thinking while reading. Specifically, these tools were the four comprehension strategies featured in reciprocal teaching: predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). During this phase, the teacher spent the first four sessions modeling each strategy independently. She then assisted students as they practiced applying them while reading text. The teacher offered support through discussion of the application of the four comprehension strategies. Additionally, we developed graphic organizers based on the four strategies that the teachers implemented during instruction.

Finally, during the 10 sessions of Phase Three, students were encouraged to participate in peer-led discussions, with support from the teacher. The goal of this phase was to help them apply the strategies while they were reading to construct
meaning. At first, the discussion was led by the teacher, who had to purposefully pull all the students into the conversation but as the sessions continued, she gradually turned responsibility over to the students.

**Findings**

**Instructional Dialogue**

Question 1 asked: What does the instructional dialogue look like when teachers implement the instructional phases of 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005)? To answer this, we examined the instructional dialogue that supports reading comprehension. Qualitative analysis of the transcriptions of the audiotaped lessons revealed that two teaching styles were evident, in spite of the fact that all teachers were trained in this type of instruction that comprises the model.

One style, which we call interactive teaching, is closely aligned to the characteristics that distinguish best practices in reading instruction (see Table 2) (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The other, described here as recitative teaching, more closely resembles the typical practice found in most classrooms as described by Pressley (2002a). Three teachers exhibited characteristics of interactive teaching, with n=15, and two teachers exhibited recitative teaching, with n=10. Table 1 includes the type of teaching style each student received during implementation of the intervention model. Through concrete instructional examples, we were able to capture a snapshot of what each of these styles of teaching look and sound like in authentic settings.

**Table 2. Stages of Teaching in the Interactive Style**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Specific Teaching Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher modeling of strategies: Explicit demonstrations of comprehension strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gradual release to students: Demonstrations of strategy application to text and support as students practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Joint peer construction of meaning: Group works together to apply strategies to construct meaning together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independent strategy application: Students internalize and apply strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interactive Teaching Style**

The first style, interactive teaching, is characterized by a dynamic flow of instruction with a powerful use of questioning embedded throughout. These teachers
used questioning as a tool for assisting students in the comprehension process as opposed to merely checking to see if the students “got it.” Instruction in this style flowed through four distinct stages that follow the recursive instructional cycle described earlier. These stages are included in Table 2.

In Stage One of the interactive teaching style, the teacher provided explicit demonstrations of the comprehension strategies. Shown below is an example taken from the lesson transcripts that exemplifies an explicit demonstration of the summarizing strategy. The teacher very clearly described the thought processes she used in order to summarize the book, *Arturo’s Baton* (Hoff, 1995).

If you look at all those pieces of information we have talked about, like our story map—our setting, the main characters, the problem and the solution—we can put them in an orderly fashion. Put them in an order that makes sense to summarize the story. We can say this is a story about Arturo and his baton and it took place on stage and in his apartment. And the problem was he lost his baton. Felix, his manager, tried to help him solve this problem of the missing baton by taking him shopping to find another one, but none of them worked out. And so he told Arturo that he could just use his baton because he was a great conductor. He did and saw that the audience enjoyed his orchestra anyway. At the end we found out what happened to the baton when Tuscany had taken it and put it somewhere. And that is how we summarize a story.

During Stage Two, the teacher provided scaffolded support as she gradually lessened explicit demonstrations and assisted students in applying the strategies to text. Several excerpts, shown below, demonstrate these teaching characteristics. The following quote shows the beginning of the gradual release process where the teacher is providing strong support to the students, helping them try out their metacognitive strategies: “We’ve been talking about conversations with the author. I want you to read and then tell me what went through your mind just like I did.”

In the next example, the teacher is nearing the later phases of the gradual release process as she provides less support in helping the students use the strategy of questioning while reading *Whales* (DuTemple, 1996):

Teacher: OK, does anyone have any questions?

Student 1: Why do those creatures come on them?

Student 2: “Barnacles are attached to the whale.” It says, “Close up look at barnacles there...”
Teacher: So how do we help Megan answer her question?

Stage Three involved peer construction of meaning as the group worked together to apply strategies and construct meaning. The following example taken from the instructional dialogue demonstrates this type of teaching as students work together to come to a joint understanding of the book *Wagon Wheels* (Brenner, 1978). Notice how the role of the teacher shifted to facilitator, suggesting strategies for the students to apply in order to gain meaning.

Student 1: “Take care of little brother and never let him out of your sight. There were tears in his eyes when he said good bye.”

Student 2: I don’t get it. Why is he leaving?

Teacher: Who can help? Remember a summary is the big ideas. So far, what’s going on in this chapter?

Student 3: Um, the dad leaves to find some shelter. And he leaves them there because they have friends.

Student 2: But I thought he was going to build a house, so why not take them or is he going to build the house and come pick them up again?

Teacher: What did we read? What is the answer to that question?

Student 3: Well I think he is going to come back for them. Well, I don’t know if he’s gonna come back but...

Teacher: What’s going on so far in the story?

Student 1: “I will go along and I will send for you when I find a place.”

Teacher: OK, now we’re making some sense! You are using your questioning strategy to help you understand.

Finally, Stage Four marked independent strategy application where students internalized and were applying the comprehension strategies to understand text. The examples shown below demonstrate conversation within this phase. Here, students commented without prompting from the teacher, in the course of peer conversations.

In the first quote, the student is applying the strategy of questioning while reading *Cam Jansen and the Triceratops Pops Mystery* (Adler, 2004), in which Cam and his friends are trying to solve the mystery of missing CDs in the music store.
The student wonders aloud, “I wonder if the girl was trying not to have them go in the back ‘cause maybe she’s working with the thief and he can get away.”

The second example shows a student demonstrating application of the predicting strategy while reading *Aldo Ice Cream* (Hurwitz, 1981), in which Aldo is trying to earn money to purchase an ice cream machine for his sister’s birthday. Without any prompt from the teacher the student uses knowledge of summer and personal experience to predict: “Um, he might have a lemonade stand...maybe, ‘cause it’s during the summer.”

**Recitative Teaching Style**

The second teaching style, recitative teaching, is marked by static interactions that did not change throughout intervention implementation. In this style of teaching, teachers used questioning as a tool to assess student comprehension and gave instructional support by either asking another question or by providing the answer. The instructional dialogue followed a back-and-forth flow of verbal exchanges in which the teacher posed a question and called on one student to respond, then offered an evaluative feedback comment, a type of discourse called I-R-E, or Initiation-Response-Evaluation (Cazden, 1986). The two excerpts shown below are taken from the lesson transcripts that exemplify characteristics of this style of teaching, while reading the book *The Paper Crane* (Bang, 1985).

Teacher: How did the old man repay him?
Student: With a paper crane.
Teacher: Yes, with a paper crane.

And there is a similar recitative flow in the following example as well.

Teacher: What does overjoyed mean?
Student: Excited?
Teacher: Excited. Very good. Why do you think he was excited to see the man?
Student: Um, probably to take the paper crane home?
Teacher: You think he was going to take it home?
Student: I think that, um, he might get something to eat again.
Teacher: But what did this man do for them? How was he important to them?
Student: He makes the paper cranes and the customers come in.
Teacher: Yes, now you got it.

Reading Comprehension Growth

Question 2 concerned examination of the growth in reading comprehension and asked: Does the implementation of 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005) impact students’ ability to comprehend grade-level text? To answer this, we performed t-test comparisons to compare growth in grade-level comprehension, pre- to postintervention using the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). The mean comprehension level for all students (N=25) as measured on the pretest was 1.92 with a standard deviation of 0.81. The mean comprehension level for all students as measured on the posttest was 3.04 with a standard deviation of 0.93. This measure reflected an increase in the group mean of 1.12 in grade-level comprehension, with a standard deviation of 0.83. Since the participating students in the study were in three different grades, measures in growth of grade-level comprehension make the data comparable. In this study, 20 of the 25 students showed gains in reading comprehension. A paired sample t-test of the pre- versus posttest measures was significant t(24)=6.73, p<.001.

Effect size for the pre- versus posttest outcome was calculated by taking the difference between the two means and dividing by the standard deviation of the pretest (Dunlop, Cortina, Vaslow, & Burke, 1996). This resulted in a large effect size of the intervention on the pretest-posttest measure of 1.35 (Cohen, 1988).

This comparison indicates significant gains in grade-level comprehension as measured pre- to postintervention on the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) (see Table 3). Hence, all students on average gained a little over one grade level in their abilities to read and comprehend after implementation of the 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005) reading intervention.

Table 3. Comparisons of Growth in Grade-Level Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group: Pre vs Post</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>1.35/Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive: Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>6.325</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>1.55/Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitative: Pre vs. Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>3.207</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>1.51/Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gains in Interactive vs. Gains in Recitative</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.31/ Small-Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closer Examination of Reading Comprehension Growth

When we determined that two teaching styles emerged, we returned to the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) data for further analysis. We wanted to compare the growth of students who received the interactive style of teaching (n=15) to those who received the recitative style of teaching (n=10). These results are also included in Table 3.

Within subjects comparisons demonstrated that each group made growth in reading comprehension (see Table 3). The interactive group improved from pre- to posttesting on the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) with a mean difference of 1.33 and a standard deviation of 0.82. The pre to post t-test comparison analysis indicates a significant gain t(14)=6.325, p<.001. Likewise, students in the recitative group improved from pre- to posttesting on the QRI-3 having a 0.80 increase in grade level with a standard deviation of 0.79. Pre- to posttest comparison analysis indicates a significant gain t(9)=3.207, p=.011. Effect size on these two comparisons was similar with 1.55 for the interactive group and 1.51 for the recitative group. These are considered large effect sizes (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4. Within Subjects Comparisons of Growth in Grade-Level Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>1.51/ Large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since both groups made gains, an analysis was conducted to determine if one group outperformed another. In other words, we compared the gains of the interactive group to those of the recitative group. A one-sample t-test comparison analysis indicates a greater gain in the interactive group as compared to the recitative group, t(9)=2.53, p=.024. Thus, interactive teaching is more effective when compared to the recitative teaching, with a small to medium effect size of 0.31 (Cohen, 1988).

Additionally, to determine if both groups were statistically the same before the intervention, deficits in reading comprehension at pretesting for each group were compared as measured on the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2005). The mean grade-level deficit for the interactive group was 1.73 with a standard deviation of 0.80, and the mean grade-level deficit for the recitative group was 1.50 with a standard deviation of 0.53. Results of a one-sample t-test indicate that the two groups were statistically the same regarding comprehension grade-level deficits at pretesting t(9)=1.131, p=0.277 ns. The sample was homogenous. Thus, it appears that
students who received the interactive style of teaching gained, on average, a little over one grade level in reading comprehension while those receiving the recitative style gained a little less than one grade, on average. Also, 14 of the 15 students in the interactive group demonstrated growth in reading comprehension as compared to only 6 of the 10 who received the recitative style teaching.

**Discussion**

**Instructional Implications**

*When Teachers Teach, Students Learn*

Results of this naturalistic study indicate that all participating students, regardless of type of style their teachers used, made gains in reading comprehension. This may suggest that students’ reading comprehension improves when given the opportunity to meet with a small group of peers, with a concentration on reading and understanding, and with a teacher’s focused instructional attention and explicit explanations. Whole group data (N=25) suggest that students gained slightly over one year in reading comprehension ability, with the mean reading comprehension grade-level progressing from 1.92 preintervention to 3.04 postintervention, as based on the results of the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). Therefore, we determined that the 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005) intervention model is effective in increasing students’ ability to read and comprehend.

*When Teachers Teach a Certain Way, Students Learn More*

Literature in the field has identified elements of best practice (Beck et al., 1997; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and elements of typical practice (Pressley, 2002a) in terms of reading comprehension instruction. When we analyzed the qualitative data from this study, we discovered differences in teaching styles, which mirror the characteristics described in best and typical practices. When teachers taught with an interactive style, embracing the constructs of best practice, their students gained more in reading comprehension than did the students of teachers who continued in the typical, recitative style. Students in the interactive style teaching groups gained more than one grade level in their ability to comprehend text, with a difference in pre- to postintervention grade-level mean scores of 1.33 on the QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). The students in the recitative style teaching groups gained less than one grade level, with a difference in pre- to postintervention grade-level mean scores of .080. Thus, we conclude that teaching is more powerful when best practices are implemented within the constructs of the 3-RCI intervention model (Diehl, 2005).
Effective Teaching Has Very Distinct and Recognizable Characteristics

Through our analysis of the transcriptions of the audiotaped lesson transcripts, we identified characteristics of two types of instructional dialogue. In line with the characteristics identified as “best practice,” interactive teaching is dynamic, changing in response to the degree of instructional support necessary for students. As the teacher is able to fade away support in one area, he or she must then pick up the level of support in another. Recitative teaching, on the other hand, is similar to the typical practice in many classrooms and does not seem responsive to the needs of the students or the demands of the text.

While we contend that a teaching script is not appropriate, nor desirable, specific and concrete characteristics may be helpful to assist teachers in planning and implementing instruction. Further, the instructional dialogue examples provided can be useful to show what each phase looks and sounds like. Consequently, teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators can use these very specific teaching characteristics to reflect upon and guide reading comprehension instruction.

Teachers Need Differentiated Support Just as Their Students Do

The 3-RCI model of instruction consists of three types of instruction: (a) metacognitive strategy instruction; (b) explicit instruction of four comprehension strategies: predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying; and (c) peer discussion of responses to text. It is imperative for teachers to be aware of the importance of metacognition in reading comprehension (Boulware-Gooden et al., 2007). Likewise, explicit strategy instruction is necessary for an effective reading program, particularly for students with poor reading comprehension abilities (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Pressley et al., 1992). However, such instruction continues to elude many intermediate-grade teachers (Pressley, 2000; Pressley 2002a). Moreover, Allington and Johnston (2002) report that exemplary teachers value student interactions with text and support their students as they talk about their responses to reading. Yet typical classroom discourse consists of an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (I-R-E) pattern of talk, in which the teacher asks a question (with an expected answer), then provides feedback to individual students who respond (Cazden, 1986). Teachers need ongoing support as they gain skill in all of the more interactive types of instruction.

The results of our study appear to mirror what is happening in classrooms on a larger scale. While all five teachers in the study received the same type and duration of staff development and support throughout project implementation, only three implemented the elements that made their teaching of comprehension strategies more effective, as concluded through analysis of the audiotaped lessons.
Even more puzzling, it appeared that all five teachers were all equally committed to embracing the instructional constructs embedded in the 3-RCI (Diehl, 2005) model. It may be that some teacher-learners need more scaffolded support than others as they learn methods that are unfamiliar to them. Hence, even teachers need and deserve differentiated instruction.

To gain skill in teaching comprehension strategies, teachers must learn how to model them, which requires the ability to think aloud for the students. A guide that uses templates for creating mental models (Nettles & Diehl, 2010) may increase teachers’ ability to show their students how to use specific comprehension strategies by thinking aloud as they read (Diehl & Nettles, 2010). Additionally, teachers need to become comfortable with classroom discourse that allows students to talk to each other as they respond to text (Rosenblatt, 1978), and share ideas about their strategy usage. As they learn to do this support is imperative, as this type of classroom environment is a departure from typical instruction, and acknowledges and accepts the ultimate responsibility for the success of each student. None of this is easy, and teachers may have trouble learning this independently. Schools must seek to become learning communities, in which teachers learn from each other as well as from their students as they implement more student-centered approaches.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

A variety of factors limit the ability to generalize these conclusions. First, our study employed a naturalistic design in order to collect data in an authentic setting, thereby gathering valid data relative to real students interacting with real teachers in a real classroom context. This gave us flexibility in meeting the needs of students throughout project implementation, but the design does have limitations, including lack of control over learner and teacher characteristics. Within this design, the statistical analysis implemented is also a limitation of this study. T-test statistical analysis assumes random assignment and groups with equal numbers. While neither of these conditions was satisfied, a third condition — homogenous groups at the onset of the study — was.

Second, the number of participants in our study was only 25, and once the two teaching styles were identified, the number of students within each subgroup was even smaller. To determine the extent to which these results can be generalized to other populations and settings, additional studies, which follow the same instructional pattern but incorporate an expanded population, are needed.

Third, the short implementation time frame of only thirty sessions made it difficult to determine both effect over time and transfer to other settings. When
looking at the learning span of struggling readers, success must be maintained over time and outside the intervention setting in order to be beneficial.

Fourth, the inherent difficulties in measuring one’s ability to comprehend is a limitation of this study, as most quantitative comprehension measures are gross in nature, reporting results in grade-level intervals. This makes it difficult to measure fine changes in comprehension ability, which is particularly important with struggling readers who may make smaller steps of progress that go undetected on these measures. More finite measures of progress in reading comprehension are needed.

And finally, a strength of this study was, ironically, also its limitation: the teachers. All five teachers appeared very dedicated to the instructional constructs embedded in the 3-RCI model (Diehl, 2005), yet only three of the five were able to apply them. The question then becomes how to provide the differentiated support to teachers so that they can teach using an interactive teaching style. It may be possible that, just like young learners, teachers benefit from the constructs of the gradual release model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and need explicit demonstrations and sustained support in knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Thus, maintaining treatment fidelity with checklists and classroom observation guides is necessary.

**Conclusion**

Educators have the responsibility to foster high levels of thoughtful literacy for all students. Ensuring lasting success for students who can recognize words but cannot comprehend what they read is of utmost importance. This basic tenet is easy to acknowledge yet difficult to deliver. Driven by the belief that teachers can make a difference for each student, we contend that the union of research and instruction manifested through this study is a start in the right direction, and agree that “all students have the ability to learn, but teachers make that ability accessible” (NCTE & IRA, 1996, p. 9). Pressley, in an interview (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2000), noted that “...struggling readers require support for the long haul, but the type of support changes” (p. 4). The long-term effects of intervention models, including the Three-Phase Reading Comprehension Intervention ([3-RCI], Diehl, 2005), must be considered. A narrow focus on instructional strategies is misguided as research has, over the years, consistently confirmed the critical importance of the teacher in improving students’ literacy capabilities (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1990). Our study validated the contention that when teachers teach, students learn, but when teachers teach really well, students learn even more.
References


Children’s Literature References


About the Authors

Dr. Holly Diehl, associate professor at California University of Pennsylvania, supervises student teachers and teaches literacy education. She worked 18 years in public schools as a teacher, curriculum coordinator, and elementary school principal. She has published articles on the topic of supporting struggling readers, and one textbook on reading comprehension.

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Books for Laughing Out Loud
Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D. & Terrell A. Young, Ed.D.

While there are many moments in life that call for somberness and even prompt us to pause and reflect, there are also moments in which we simply celebrate the joy of being alive and savor the funny side of our days. Writer Mark Twain, an authority on what makes us laugh, once stated, “humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.” Humor and laughter certainly add to life’s pleasures, and sometimes it is a good idea not to take life or ourselves so seriously. Certainly, when it comes to humorous books, young readers cannot get enough of them. Teachers looking for a way to hook reluctant readers on a book may find that humorous texts provide one way to do so.

Naturally, there are many different types of humor and quite divergent reactions to humorous books. While younger readers chortle at silly slapstick stories that are often too predictable to appeal to their older siblings, older readers may delight in clever puns and word play. Then again, as was the case with the wildly popular Chicken Butt (Perl, 2009) and its successor Chicken Butt’s Back (Perl, 2011), young readers relish word play based on homonyms and homophones as well. Decades after its publication, The King Who Rained (1988) by Fred Gwynne still prompts snorts and guffaws. Boys may hoot and holler about books that many girls find humorless and disgusting. While there are no books that are universally funny to both genders or all age groups, there are certainly a variety of books available that are sure to tickle some readers and bring smiles to some faces. Sometimes the humor comes through the text, sometimes it is enhanced by the illustrations with cleverly hidden comic elements, and sometimes both text and illustrations make readers laugh. We share some of our favorite funny books below.

Grades K-3


Poor Mama! After a long day she puts her chicks to bed but, time after time, once the door has closed, they refuse to settle down. In desperation, savvy Mama joins the fun, and she runs those chicks
ragged. Finally, utterly exhausted, they fall to sleep, leaving her to enjoy some solitude. The clever story of chicks getting their comeuppance is completed by amusing illustrations such as a DVD playing the movie Gone with the Wing. If the drawings on the wall in the chicks’ bedroom look as though they were drawn by children, that’s because they were. Those pictures are the products of the author and the illustrator’s children. This one is filled with treats for the eye and ear and will make adults laugh as much as their offspring.


Children will relish this delightful retelling of “The Frog Prince” with photographs of costumed English bulldogs. Princess Zelda was so beautiful that “her smile had been known to stop villagers in their tracks” (n.p.). Her adoring parents were able to grant her every desire except for a good night’s sleep. When her golden ball lands in the mud, Zelda must make a decision. Does she allow the ugliest frog that she has ever seen retrieve her ball or does she change into her “fetching purple bikini” (n.p.) and get it herself? Must a princess keep a promise she made to a frog? Do the unsightly frog’s snores become melodious music to an insomniac princess?


In the seventh title in this series that is likely to appeal to fans of the Clementine and Judy Moody books, third-grader Grace and her best friend Mimi are in for some surprises. Mimi longs for a sister, but when someone new joins the family, the new addition is not quite what she expected. Grace, on the other hand, gets exactly what she has wanted for a long time, but she finds that her surprise brings lots of unexpected responsibilities as well as some early waking hours. How the two friends navigate school, disappointments, and family dynamics provides plenty of amusing passages as well as some good life lessons.
Amphibians abound, and tongues are flapping and zapping across the pages in this hilarious send-up of the classic sing-along taught in many schools. In this version of “The Hokey Pokey,” frogs and a turtle are in pursuit of a fly buzzing tantalizingly nearby, and as they try to catch him, he stays just out of reach. As their tongues fly out, they end up wrapped around each other, leaving the fly free—or is he? Young readers—and older ones too—will laugh at the illustrations and sound effects provided with a resounding “WHAP!” It is impossible to resist the humorous lines and the temptation to dance as you read this one aloud.

Ohora, Zachariah. (2011). *Stop snoring, Bernard!*

Bernard is an otter that loves living at the zoo. His favorite time is nap time, but Bernard’s loud snoring bothers the other otters. Grumpy Giles even tells him to “snore somewhere else!” (n.p.). Although Bernard dutifully tries napping in other places, he is always awoken with the irritated and loud refrain: “Stop snoring, Bernard!” (n.p.). Poor, Bernard! What is he going to do? How is an otter to get any sleep with all that moving around?


Tobias’s dad is a lot like other dads in that he likes corny jokes, magic tricks, and meat; wears a tie; and works hard. But unlike the other dads, Tobias’s dad is forty feet long, fifteen feet tall, has teeth as sharp as steak knives, and weighs as much as a steam locomotive. That makes sense since his dad is a tyrannosaurus! Unfortunately, sometimes he is so preoccupied with work that he has to miss some of Tobias’s events. Tobias hopes his dad can come to his school’s Field
Day baseball game but when the Chickenbone Gang tries to take over the game and his father hasn’t arrived yet, readers will wonder whether Tyrannosaurus Dad will show up and save the day.


More than anything else, Skippyjon Jones wants to go to school. But Mama Junebug Jones reminds him, “School is for the DOGS! ... They’re unruly and drooly” (n.p.). Not even his mother’s protests can keep Skippyjon Jones from going off to school “with a grande ol’ bunch of poochitos” (n.p.). Once he arrives there, this kitty with an identity problem excels in all subjects and impresses his art, music, and French teachers. Yet his most important work of the day is when “El Skippito” saves his canine friends from the wooly bully, the terror of the playground. Fans of this series will love this new addition to the *Skippyjon* collection.


Told in a series of senryu (a form of Japanese poetry with 17 syllables that focuses on the foibles of human [or cat] nature), this beguiling story of a shelter cat and the boy who adopts him will bring laughter to the lips and warmth to the heart. As visitors arrive at the shelter, the aloof cat wonders whether they will choose dogs or cats: “Dogs have hair. Cats, fur. / Dogs whine, yip, howl, bark. Cats purr. / I say: No Contest” (n.p.). After the adoption, there is the necessary time of adjustment, and the cat’s true personality is revealed: “Sorry about the/squishy in your shoe. Must’ve been something I ate.” This is one cat with his own ideas about house rules: “Scratching-post? Haven’t heard of it. Besides, the couch/is so much closer” (n.p.). Cats’ ideas about ownership often differ from those of humans: “Eavesdropping, I hear:/ “My cat.” Great Rats! Don’t you know/ yet that you’re My Boy?” (n.p.). Kids will return to this book over and over as they are reminded of how poetry can be so funny and so much fun!

Because some children just never learn their lessons from the kindly Mother Goose, she must send the hardest cases to her sister, the much tougher Spinster Goose. They have met their match in this taskmaster as she makes sure that Lucy Locket, Wee Willy Winkie, Mary and her lamb, Little Jack Horner, and a host of other nursery rhyme characters are properly disciplined, no matter what it takes. It’s great fun to read and laugh at these rhymes and the literary license the poet has taken with 27 of the familiar stories and characters. While young readers will delight in repeating these out loud, older readers will delight in the zing and utter meanness of them all, and be glad to see the miscreants get their just desserts. There will be no complaints if you read this one again and again.

**Grades 4-6**


In this hilarious yet moving story set in 1959-1960, sixth grader Abby Shapiro lives with her extended Jewish family in a large house and all she really wants is a bra and a Barbie doll, both of which all of her friends seem to have. Precocious Abby spends her spare time sketching and designing clothing. Recognizing a kindred soul in the always-fashionable Jacqueline Kennedy, wife of the Massachusetts Senator and later President, Abby begins writing her. She pours out her soul in those letters as well as offering her design ideas to Jackie at a discount rate. While Abby struggles with a mean girl at school and family dynamics that include more than a handful of secrets, her voice and determination never flag. The book contains actual sketches made by the author when she was young.
Kitty has faced many indignities in life, far more than any feline should have to endure. First, there was the disgusting dog: “worse than its ugliness, worse than its terrible stink, and even worse than the never-ending trail of ooze it left behind wherever it went was that the beast never seemed to sleep” (pp. 11-12). Then, there was the time Uncle Murray came to care for Kitty and Puppy, which didn’t go very well. Now a new, noisy creature enters Kitty’s life: a baby! How could a baby displace Kitty? The adoption of the baby triggers many zany events in the family’s life, but readers find out Kitty’s true feelings toward the new addition when it is time for the baby’s bath.

Utterly uncool Mac Slater and his friend Paul head off to New York City, courtesy of a website dedicated to identifying what’s cool and hip before it becomes that way. As coolhunters, their job is to identify trends in the making before the other coolhunters do. Things go wrong from the first. Mac’s fancy camera is stolen by some skateboarders. When he finally does find a girl with all sorts of cool gadgets, she doesn’t want any publicity. When Mac stumbles on a perpetual motion car that requires no costly fuel, he faces a moral dilemma. One of the best parts of the book features Mac’s hilarious interviews with kids whose parents are so charged with caffeine that the kids sleep in retaliation.

As they did in the earlier *A Curious Collection of Cats* (2009), Franco and Wertz team up to pay tribute to dogs. Thirty-four concrete poems describe vividly the myriad personalities, behaviors, and breeds. There are poems about dogs alone and dogs with other dogs, and all of them are doing the most doggone things. In these poems, canines slobber all over tennis balls until they have just the right moisture level, run through parks, take their owners on walks, and simply make life for those lucky enough to live with a canine such doggone good fun. Irreverently, Franco captures the revulsion of being in an enclosed car with a dog that farts. Anyone who has watched a dog circle almost endlessly for just the right spot in which to settle down will enjoy these spot-on poems. Although the vibrant illustrations sometimes threaten to overpower the poems, they, too, add to the fun of celebrating a dog’s life.


Twenty-nine poems, some as off-putting as they are amusing, show that biology and poetry make a prefect pairing. In graphic language, the amusing poems describe how various life forms survive, making it clear what they prefer to eat and in some cases, how long it takes for the food to be digested. Back matter includes additional scientific information on each of the living things, which range from sloths to wood turtles. There’s even a poem about the Venus flytrap. The cartoon illustrations add to the fun.

Filled with detailed illustrations and engaging text, this text takes readers on a hair-raising ride through history by describing the hairstyles and adornments for the hair of men and women through the ages. The author starts with the prehistoric period when paintbrushes may have served as grooming aids, and then moves through several historical periods. By doing so, she allows readers to note the hair trends that came and went and came back again; you might be tempted to say they were hair today and gone tomorrow. The gouache illustrations highlight interesting hair notes; for instance, insects have been known to be found in the teased beehives popular in the 1960s. Young readers will enjoy learning the lengths that men and women went to to beautify their heads. They’ll shake their heads and laugh at the many possible cures for baldness including all types of animal urine. Back matter includes additional hair facts complementing each of the historical periods described earlier and a list of references.


This third title in the Annabelle Unleashed series follows the intrepid Annabelle through further perils of middle school. Everyone in her class is excited about the upcoming school dance, and they all have dates. Or so they say. And while Annabelle doesn’t really think she needs a date, she starts to have unexplained feelings toward her friend Oliver with whom she is working on a project for the science fair. But her crush will have to remain secret because, alas!, her friend Claire has already announced her fondness for the same boy. What’s a girl to do if she wants to keep her friend? Annabelle decides to keep her feelings to herself. As might be expected, much amusement and embarrassment ensue as the coupling proceeds.
Grades 7-8


Donna Jackson interviewed 19 experts about different aspects of humor to write this fun treatise on what makes people laugh. Jackson is able to explain how one’s age, gender, and culture contribute to what is considered funny and appropriate to laugh about; how television made use of “canned” laughter to encourage more laughter in live audiences; the anatomy of a laugh; how to tell jokes that will make others laugh; and much, much more in this entertaining volume. Stearn’s hilarious illustrations are the perfect complement to Jackson’s amusing subject matter.


Tired of the top dogs at her middle school keeping everyone in their place, Olivia draws on her experiences with the animal kingdom to shake up the social order. She decides that people are actually a lot like dogs, and can be categorized as certain dog types. Subsequently, she and her friends begin to “train” their classmates, rewarding them when they shun the school Mean Girl, Brynne, or do something that supports their cause. As the alpha dog loses her place in the school social order, Olivia realizes that there is a high price to pay for popularity, and maybe, just maybe, being able to “fetch” popularity by manipulating others isn’t worth the price.
References


About the Authors

Barbara A. Ward is Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at Washington State University, Pullman, Washington. Terrell A. Young is Professor of Children’s Literature at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
History and Mission of Reading Horizons

Reading Horizons began in 1960 as a local newsletter and has developed into an international journal serving major colleges, universities, and individual subscribers across the United States and Canada as well as a host of other countries. The journal serves as a forum for ideas from many schools of thought dedicated to building upon the knowledge base of literacy through research, theoretical essays, opinion pieces, policy studies, and syntheses of best practices. Reading Horizons seeks to bring together school professionals, literacy researchers, teacher educators, parents, and community leaders as they work collaboratively to widen the horizons of literacy and the language arts.

Submitting Manuscripts

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to the editor, Allison L. Baer, at allison.baer@wmich.edu. Please send one copy with full author(s) information, one clean copy with no identifying information, and an abstract. All bitmap image files used must be submitted as separate hi-resolution (300dpi) files in jpg or tif format. Embedded images in articles accepted for publication will be deleted from the final publication unless submitted in this manner. Manuscripts should be approximately 25 pages in length, not counting references and figures, double-spaced, and using 1.25 margins and 12-point font. Manuscripts will be acknowledged within two weeks of submission. Manuscripts must follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 5th Edition. Those not written in this style will be returned without review.

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After in-house review by the editor, and if accepted for review, manuscripts will be sent to two members of our Editorial Advisory Board for blind review. Author(s) will be informed of our decision within four to five months of submission. Criteria used for evaluating and reviewing manuscripts are significance of the contribution to literacy/language arts research and instruction, clarity of writing, and sound methodology process used.
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